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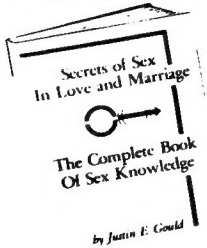

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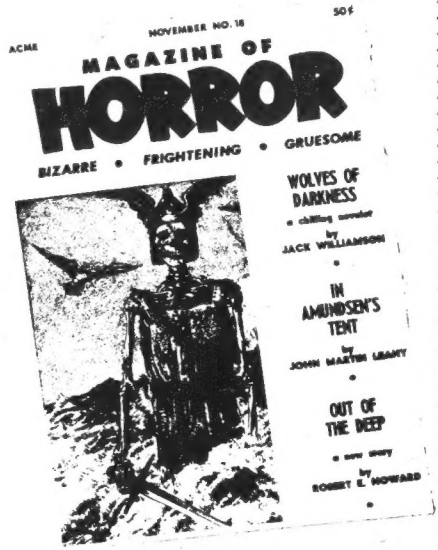

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Editorial

Standards In Science Fiction

by ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES

Science Fiction As Delight

(Part Two)

THOSE WORKS which you or I have found delightful in reading, in the sense that we have been impelled to return to them again and again, may or may not include items which are generally agreed to be the great masterpieces of literature, although the literary person will certainly find that a fair number of works cited as great literature are on his list. But in science fiction, where so much emotion is involved in what we call "respectability"— recognition on the part of various "authorities", or authority figures such as parents, teachers, etc., that a particular work has solid merit and is worth reading for its own sake, putting the science fiction label aside— many readers are tempted to try to produce the proper re-

sponses to works that various respectable critics, etc., have praised, rather than candidly examining their own reading behavior and learning from their own personal preferences what they have really found delightful. (Art, and response to art, is not a duty.)

I have often been so tempted, and the temptation returned when I first planned this editorial, some months back. It was only after recognizing the temptation for what it was that I was able to make a harder choice in respect to the authors I decided to use for illustrations of those elements which, it seems to me, are essential ingredients in that final product I call delight. Instead of just selecting authors whom critics both inside and outside of the science fiction orbit have praised, I asked myself: Which authors have I actually found myself re-reading to any extent within the past five years or so? Which authors, upon re-reading one work have so pleased me that I was moved to try something by them that I had not read before — or the reverse? And I ruled out from the start those authors whose works I had read during that period only from editorial necessity; I confined myself to those whose stories I found myself reading when there was no vocational need to read science fiction at all, and I could just as easily have chosen some other type of fiction, or non-fiction, which I read more generally these years.

Now it so happens that all six of my authors have been highly praised and discussed at one time or another, but all six would not be found on the top of a "best" list in any survey conducted among the most literary minded of science fiction readers. The exclusion of various authors in this discussion does not mean that I demean them or that I might not be willing to conceed them higher marks (in certain respects, at least) than some of the six I have chosen. And even in the matter of delight, there are two that had to be bypassed because of the rules I set myself: C. S. Lewis and Isaac Asimov. During the period I had read, for the first time, Lewis' trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra,* and *That Hideous Strength,* and I had re-read Asimov's Foundation trilogy. The Lewis series I regard as the finest science fiction novels, in some respects, that I have ever read; and I do expect to re-read the Foundation trilogy yet again. But I was not impelled to go farther with either of these two authors' science fiction at the time, nor have I since, up to the present moment. So I shall have to let both of these authors go with special mention. And I might add that while I have also read some fiction by Theodore Sturgeon and Arthur C. Clarke during this period,

both with respect and enjoyment, this reading was done in the line of duty and left me with no impulse to go farther on the outside.

THE SIX INGREDIENTS which I have chosen to discuss as essential elements combining to delight in a way where the whole far outweighs any part are: Invention, Suspense, Characterization, Surprise, Richness, and Reward — and I wish now that I had used the word "demand" for that final element, because "reward" is the potential end-product of yielding to an author's demands upon you; but it's too late to make the change now.

These six elements do not exhaust the list, but they will do for a starting point; and in the end, a starting point is all that critical writing can do for a reader, anyway. Critical writing, where it has meaning for you, can do no more than lead you to read something you have never read before, or to re-read something in which you had not found so much as the critic has found, or to think about something you have read in a way which you had not thought about it before — with or without actual re-reading. And what conclusions you may come to is none of the critic's business; he may hope to persuade you that his way of seeing the works he discusses is the right way, or a better way than someone else's, but he can consider himself successful with you if he has induced you to think about something in relation to these works that you had not thought about before, or had not thought about with any particular consideration before. C. S. Lewis notes, in a very fine book he wrote *Experiment in Criticism,* that nothing so illuminates a critical work than reading the book the critic is discussing; and this ironic point seems to me to be a very sound one. While there are some critics who would rather have you read their interpretations of a book than the book itself, this is not what criticism is for; such critics have succumbed to one of the most deadly occupational diseases of their vocation.

THE SIX AUTHORS I have chosen are: Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, E. E. Smith, Ph. D., Robert A. Heinlein, and James Blish. In this section of the essay, we shall consider the first three, saving the second trio for the final part, due to space considerations in a magazine of fiction. For the record, here is what I have read or re-read of Verne, Wells, and Burroughs within the alloted period. (If this list seems small, bear in mind that I have read fewer items, or none at all, by other science fiction authors outside the area of necessity.)

(Turn to page 119)

THE PYGMY PLANET

by JACK WILLIAMSON

Down into the infinitely small goes Larry on his mission to the Pygmy Planet . . .

NOTHING EVER happens to me!" Larry Manahan grumbled under his breath, sitting behind his desk at the advertising agency which employed his services in return for the consideration of fifty a week. "All the adventure I know is what I see in the movies, or read about in magazines. What wouldn't I give for a slice of real life!"

Unconsciously, he tensed the muscles of his six feet of lean, hard body. His crisp, flame-colored hair seemed to bristle; his blue eyes blazed. He clenched a brown hammer of a fist.

Larry felt himself an energetic, red-blooded square peg, badly afflicted with the urge for adventure, miserably wedged in a round hole.

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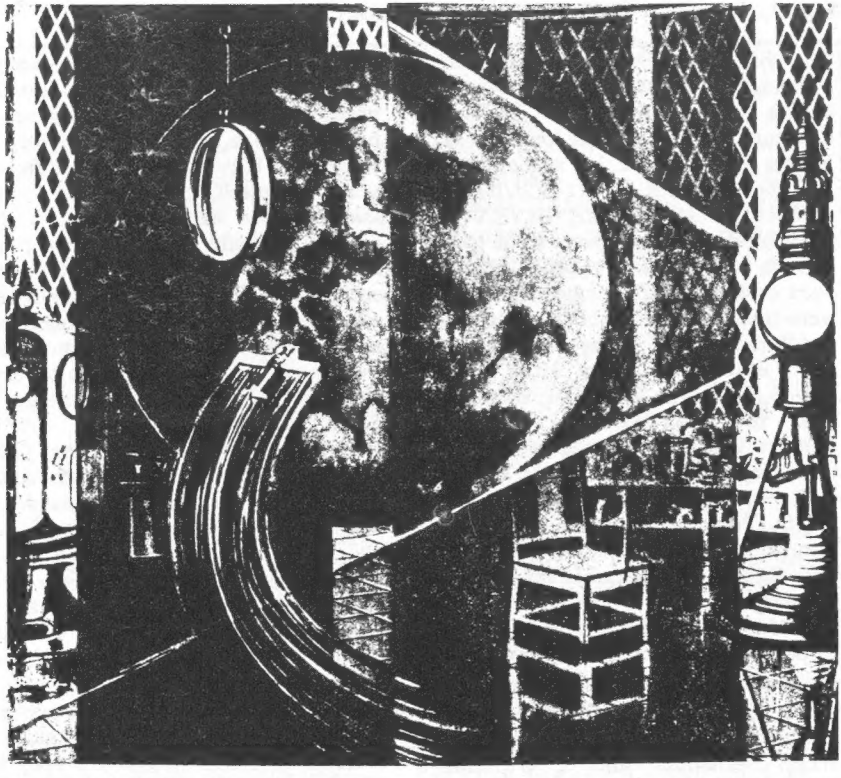


(illustration by H. W. Wesso)

It is one of the misfortunes of our civilization that a young man who, for example, might have been an excellent pirate a couple of centuries ago, must be kept chained to a desk. And that seemed to be Larry's fate.

"Things happen to other people," he muttered. "Why couldn't an adventure come to me?"

He sat, staring wistfully at a picture of a majestic mountain landscape, soon to be used in the advertising of a railway company whose publicity was handled by his agency, when the jangle of the telephone roused him with a start.

"Oh, Larry . . . " came a breathless, quivering voice.

Then, with a click, the connection was broken.

The rates were not high, nor was payment speedy, in the early science fiction magazines, until William Clayton turned one of his editors, Harry Bates, loose on a magazine to be entitled *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE,* contributors to which were to be paid 2 cents a word on acceptance. I have been told that higher rates than this were paid by other publishers during the "golden age" of the pulps, somewhat earlier than late 1929 when *Astounding* first appeared; nonetheless, this was fantastic pay for authors who had been receiving fractions of 1 cent a word after a long wait for their manuscripts to see print. (Perhaps some economically-minded reader with access to facts and figures can estimate how much an author today would have to receive for a 5,000 word story in order to realize the purchasing power that $100 that Bates would have paid him. My imagination reels!) But authors who had been writing for Hugo Gernsback and T. O'Conor Sloane found that all was not quite so simple and delightful as it seemed; Bates did not want speculations and extrapolations on accurate science in narrative form—he wanted action pulp stories, following the general pulp formulas, with "super-scientific" trappings. Having had a scientific education himself, the new editor found that he often had to write in some science himself, as the reliable pulp authors, for the most part, were entirely innocent of it. He was interested (as any editor is) in obtaining new stories from authors who were well-known to science fiction lovers. And one who, I should imagine, gave Bates no difficulty was JACK WILLIAMSON, whose strong point was always imagination and the ability to write a thrilling story, as Jack had well proved in such novels as *The Green Girl* and *The Alien Intelligence.* Better still, Williamson could fulfill the outward amenities, as it were, of the "pulp formula" without being straitjacketed into the tired-sounding repetitions that many of the established pulp "names" used when writing for Bates, and whose stories Bates used out of desperate necessity. My feeling is that Jack had fun writing *The Pygmy Planet,* and that is partly why it's still fun to read.

The voice had been feminine and had carried a familiar ring. Larry tried to place it, as he listened at the receiver and attempted to get the broken connection restored.

"Your party hung up, and won't answer," the operator informed him.

He replaced the receiver on the thin thread of memory given him by the familiar note in that eager excited voice. If only the girl had spoken a few more words!

THEN IT came to him.

"Agnes Sterling!" he exclaimed aloud.

Agnes Sterling was a slender, elfish, dark-haired girl—lovely, he had thought her, on the occasions of their few brief meetings. Larry knew her as the secretary and lab-

oratory assistant of Dr. Travis Whiting, a retired college professor known for his work on the structure of the atom. Larry had called at the home-laboratory of the savant, months before, to check certain statistics to be used for advertising purposes and had met the girl there. Only a few times since had he seen her.

Now she had called him in a voice that fairly trembled with excitement—and, he thought, dread! And she had been interrupted before she had time to give him any message.

For a few seconds Larry stared at the telephone. Then he rose abruptly to his feet, crammed his hat on his head, and started for the door.

"The way to find adventure is to go after it," he murmured. "And this is the invitation!"

It was not many minutes later that he sprang out of a taxi at the front of the building in which Dr. Travis Whiting made his home and maintained a private experimental laboratory. It was a two-story stucco house, rather out of date, set well back from the sidewalk, with a scrap of lawn and a few straggling shrubs before it. The door was closed, the windows curtained blankly. The place seemed deserted and forbidding.

Larry ran up the uneven brick walk to the door and rang the bell. Impatiently, he waited a few moments. No sound came from within. He felt something ominous, fateful, about the silent mystery that seemed to shroud the old house. For the first time, it occurred to him that Agnes might be in physical danger, as a result of some incautious experiment on the part of Dr. Whiting.

INSTINCTIVELY, his hand sought the door knob. To his surprise, the door was unlocked. It swung open before him. For a moment he stared, hesitating, into the dark hall revealed beyond. Then, driven by the thought that Agnes might be in danger, he advanced impulsively.

The several doors opening into the hall were closed. The one at the back, he knew, gave admittance to the laboratory. Impelled by some vague premonition, he hastened toward it down the long hall and threw it open.

As he stepped inside the room, his foot slipped on a spot of something red. Recovering his balance with difficulty, he peered about.

Bending down, Larry briefly examined the red spot on which he had slipped. It was a pool of fresh blood which had not yet darkened. Lying beside it, crimson-splashed, was a revolver. As he picked up the weapon, he cried out in astonishment.

Something had happened to the gun. The trigger guard was torn

from it, and the cylinder crushed as if in some resistless grasp; the stock was twisted, and the barrel bent almost into a circle. The revolver had been crumpled by some terrific force — as a soft clay model of it might have been broken by the pressure of a man's hand.

"Crimson shades of Caesar!" he muttered, and dropped the crushed weapon to the floor again.

His eyes swept the silent laboratory.

It was a huge room, taking up all the rear part of the house, from the first floor to the roof. Gray daylight streamed through a skylight, twenty feet overhead. The ends of the vast room were cluttered with electrical and chemical apparatus; but Larry's eye was caught at once by a strange and complex device, which loomed across from him, in the center of the floor.

TWO PILLARS of intense light, a ray of crimson flame and another of deeply violet radiance, beat straight down from a complicated array of enormous, oddly shaped electron tubes, of mirrors and lenses and prisms, of coils and whirling disks, which reached almost to the roof. Upright, a yard in diameter and almost a yard apart, the strange columns of light were sharp-edged as two transparent cylinders filled with liquid light of ruby and of amethyst. Each ray poured down upon a circular platform of glass or polished crystal.

Hanging between those motionless cylinders of red and violet light was a strange-looking, greenish globe. A round ball, nearly a yard in diameter, hung between the rays, almost touching them. Its surface was oddly splotched with darker and lighter areas. It was spinning steadily, at a low rate of speed. Larry did not see what held it up; it seemed hanging free, several feet above the crystal platforms.

Reluctantly he withdrew his eyes from the mysterious sphere and looked about the room once more. No, the laboratory was vacant of human occupants. No one was hidden among the benches that were cluttered with beakers and test tubes and stills, or among the dynamos and transformers in the other end of the room.

A confusion of questions beat through Larry's brain.

What danger could be haunting this quiet laboratory? Was this the the blood of Agnes Sterling or the scientist who employed her that was now clotting on the floor? What terrific force had crumpled up the revolver? What had become of Agnes and Dr. Whiting? And of whatever had attacked them? Had Agnes called him after the attack, or before?

DESPITE HIMSELF, his attention was drawn back to the little globe spinning so regularly, floating in the air between the pillars of red and violet flame. Floating alone, like a little world in space, without a visible support, it might be held up by magnetic attraction, he thought.

A tiny planet!

His mind quickened at the idea, and he half forgot the weird mystery gathering about him. He stepped nearer the sphere. It was curiously like a miniature world. The irregular bluish areas would be seas; the green and the brown spaces land. In some parts, the surface appeared mistily obscured—perhaps, by masses of cloud.

Larry saw an odd-looking lamp, set perhaps ten feet behind the slowly spinning, floating ball, throwing upon it a bright ray of vividly blue light. Half the strange sphere was brilliantly illuminated by it; the rest was in comparative darkness. That blue lamp, it came to Larry, lit the sphere as the sun lights Earth.

"Nonsense!" he muttered. "It's impossible!"

Aroused by the seeming wonder of it, he was drawn nearer the ball. It spun rather slowly, Larry noted, and each rotation consumed several seconds. He could distinguish green patches that might be forests, and thin, silvery lines that looked like rivers, and broad, red-brown areas that must be deserts, and the broad blue stretches that suggested oceans.

"A toy world!" he cried. "A laboratory planet! What an experiment . . . "

Then his eyes, looking up, caught the glistening, polished lens of a powerful magnifying glass which hung by a black ribbon from a hook on one of the heavy steel beams which supported the huge mass of silently whirring apparatus.

EAGERLY, HE unfastened the magnifier. Holding it before his eyes, he bent toward the strange sphere spinning steadily in the air.

"Suffering shades of Caesar!" he ejaculated.

Beneath the lens a world was racing. He could see masses of vividly green forest; vast expanses of bare, cracked, ocherous desert; wastes of smooth blue ocean.

Then he was gazing at—a city?

Larry could not be sure that he had seen correctly. It had slipped very swiftly beneath his lens. But he had a momentary impression of tiny, fantastic buildings, clustered in an elflike city.

A pygmy planet, spinning in the laboratory like a world in the gulf of space! What could it mean? Could it be connected with the strange call from Agnes, with the blood on the floor, with the strange

and ominous silence that shrouded the deserted room?

"Oh, Larry!" a clear, familiar voice rang suddenly from the door. "You came!"

Startled, Larry leaped back from the tiny, whirling globe and turned to the door. A girl had come silently into the room. It was Agnes Sterling. Her dark hair was tangled. Her small face was flushed, and her brown eyes were wide with fear! In a white hand, which shook a little, she carried a small, gold-plated automatic pistol.

She ran nervously across the wide floor to Larry, with relief dawning in her eyes.

"I'm so glad you came!" she gasped, panting with excitement. "I started to call you on the phone, but then I was afraid it would kill you if you came! Please be careful! It may come back, any minute! You'd better go away! It just took Dr. Whiting!"

"Wait a minute," Larry put in. "Just one thing at a time. Let's get this straight. To begin with, what is it that might kill me, and that got the doctor?"

"It's terrible!" she gasped, trembling. "A monster! You must go away before it comes back!"

LARRY DREW a tall stool from beside one of the crowded tables and placed it beside her.

"Don't get excited," he urged. "I'm sure everything will be all right. Just sit down, and tell me about it. The whole story. Just what is going on here, and what happened to Dr. Whiting."

He helped her upon the stool. She looked up at him gratefully, and began to speak in a rapid voice.

"You see that little planet? The monster came from that and carried the doctor back there. And I know it will soon be back for another victim—for sacrifice!"

She had pointed across the great room, toward the strange little globe which hung between the pillars of red and violet light.

"Please go slow!" Larry broke in. "You're too fast for me. Are you trying to tell me that that spinning ball is really a planet?"

Agnes seemed a little more composed, though she was still flushed and breathing rapidly. Her small hand still gripped the bright automatic.

"Yes, it is a planet. The Pygmy Planet, Dr. Whiting called it. He said it was the great experiment of the century. You see, he was testing evolution. We began with the planet, young and hot, and watched it until it is now almost as old as Mars. We watched the change and development of life upon it. And the rise and decay of a strange civilization. Until now its people are strange things, with human brains in mechanical bodies, wor-

shiping a rusty machine like a god . . . "

"Go slow!" Larry pleaded again. "I don't see — Did the doctor build — create — that planet himself?"

"Yes. It began with his work on atomic structure. He discovered that certain frequencies of the X-ray — so powerful that they are almost akin to the cosmis ray — have the power of altering electronic orbits. Every atom, you know, is a sort of solar system, with electrons revolving about a proton.

"And these rays would cause the electrons to fall into incredibly smaller orbits, causing vast reduction in the size of the atoms, and in the size of any object which the atoms formed. They would cause anything, living or dead, to shrink to inconceivably microscopic dimensions — or restore it to its former size, depending upon the exact wavelength used.

"And time passes far more swiftly for the tiny objects — probably because the electrons move faster in their smaller orbits. That is what suggested to Dr. Whiting that he would be able to watch the entire life of a planet, in the laboratory. And so, at first, we experimented merely with solitary specimens or colonies of animals.

But on the Pygmy Planet we have watched the life of a world — have watched the whole panorama of evolution . . . "

"IT SEEMS TOO wonderful!" Larry muttered. "Could Dr. Whiting actually decrease his size and become a dwarf?"

"No trick at all," Agnes assured him. "All you have to do is stand in the violet beam, to shrink. And move over in the red one, when you want to grow. I have been several times with Dr. Whiting to the Pygmy Planet."

"Been . . . " Larry stopped, breathless with astonishment.

"See the little airplane," Agnes said, pointing under the table.

Larry gasped.

Beneath the table stood a toy airplane. The spread of its glistening, perfect wings was hardly three feet. A wonderful, delicate toy, accurate in every detail of propeller, motor and landing gear, of brace and rudder and aileron. Then he realized that it was no toy at all, but a faithful miniature of a commercial plane. A complete, tiny copy of one of the latest single-motor, cabin monoplane models.

"It looks as if it would fly," he said; "a friend of mine has a big one, just like it! Taught me to fly it, last summer vacation. This is the very image of it!"

"It will fly!" Agnes assured him, now composed enough to smile at his amazement. "I have

been with the doctor to the Pygmy Planet in it.

"You stand in the violet ray until you're about three inches high," she explained, "and then get into the plane. Then you fly up and into the violet ray at the point where it touches the planet, and remain there while you grow smaller. When you are the right size, all you have to do is drop to the surface, and land. To come away, you rise into the red ray and stay in it till you grow to proper size, when you come down and land."

"You—you've actually done that?" he gasped. "It sounds like a fairy story!"

"YES, I'VE done it," she assured him. Then she shuddered apprehensively. "And the things—the machine-monsters, Dr. Whiting called them—have learned to do it, too. One of them came down the red ray, and attacked him. The doctor had a gun—but what could he do against one of those?" She shivered.

"It carried him back up the violet beam. Just a few minutes ago, I started to phone you. Then I was afraid you would be hurt . . . "

"Me, hurt?" Larry burst out. "What about you, here alone?"

"It was my business. Dr. Whiting told me there might be danger, when he hired me."

"And now, what can we do?" Larry demanded.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I'm afraid one of the monsters will be back after a new victim. We could smash the apparatus, but it is too wonderful to be destroyed. And besides, Dr. Whiting may have escaped. He may be alive there, in the deserts!"

"We might fly up, in the little plane," Larry proposed, doubtfully. "I think I could pilot it. If you want . . . "

The girl's body stiffened. Her brown eyes widened with sudden dread, and her small face went pale. She slipped quickly from the stool, drawing in her breath with a sort of gasp. The hand that gripped the automatic trembled a little.

"What's the matter?" Larry cried.

"I thought . . . " she gasped, "I think I see something in the ray! The machine-monster is coming back!"

Her lips tightened. She lifted the little automatic and began to shoot into the pillar of crimson fire beside the tiny, spinning globe.

Larry, watching tensely, saw a curious, bird-like something fluttering about in the red ray, swiftly-growing larger!

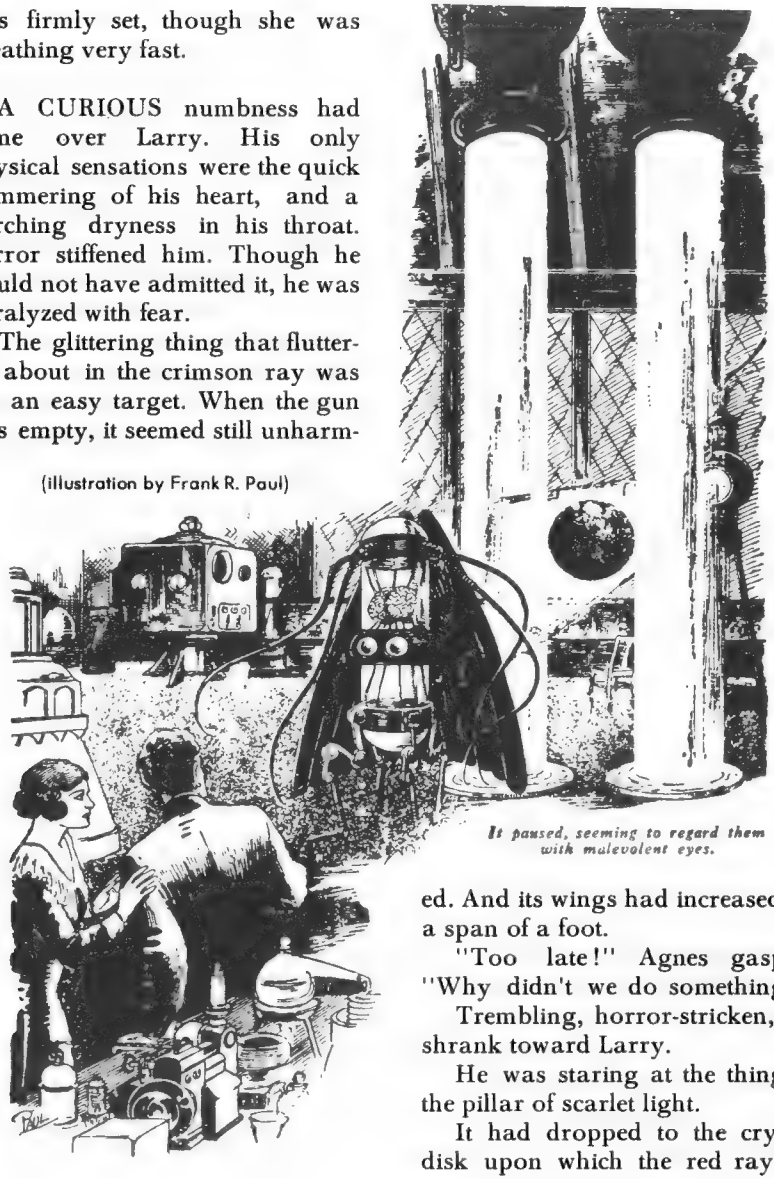
Deliberately, and pausing to aim carefully for each shot, the girl emptied the little gun at the figure. Her body was rigid, her small face

was firmly set, though she was breathing very fast.

A CURIOUS numbness had come over Larry. His only physical sensations were the quick hammering of his heart, and a parching dryness in his throat. Terror stiffened him. Though he would not have admitted it, he was paralyzed with fear.

The glittering thing that fluttered about in the crimson ray was not an easy target. When the gun was empty, it seemed still unharmed. And its wings had increased to a span of a foot.

(illustration by Frank R. Paul)



It paused, seeming to regard them with malevolent eyes.

"Too late!" Agnes gasped. "Why didn't we do something?"

Trembling, horror-stricken, she shrank toward Larry.

He was staring at the thing in the pillar of scarlet light.

It had dropped to the crystal disk upon which the red ray fell

from the huge, glowing tube above. It stood there, motionless except for the swift increase of its size.

Lary gazed at it, lost in fear and wonder. It was like nothing he had ever seen. What was it that Agnes had said, of machine-monsters, of human brains in mechanical bodies? His brain reeled. He strained his eyes to distinguish the monstrosity more clearly. It was veiled in crimson flame; he could not see it distinctly.

But suddenly, when it was as tall as himself, it sprang out into the room, toward Larry and the shuddering girl. Just off the crystal disk, beyond the scarlet pillar of fire, it paused for long seconds, seeming to regard them with malevolent eyes.

For the first time, Larry could see it plainly.

Its body, or its central part, was a tube of transparent crystal; an upright cylinder, rounded at upper and lower ends. It was nearly a foot in diameter, and four feet long. It seemed filled with a luminous, purple liquid.

About the cylinder were three bands of greenish, glistening metal. Attached to the lower band were four jointed legs of the same bright green metal, upon which the strange thing stood.

Set in the middle band were two glittering, polished lenses, which seemed to serve as eyes, and Larry felt that they were gazing at him with malevolent menace. Behind the eyes, two wings sprang from the green band. Ingenious, folding wings, of thin plates and bars of green metal.

And from the upper band sprang four slender, glistening, whip-like tentacles, metallic and brilliantly green, two yards in length. They writhed with strange life!

IT SEEMED a long time to Larry that the thing stood, motionless, seeming to stare evilly at them with eye-like lenses. Then, lurching forward a little, it moved toward them upon legs of green metal. And now Larry saw another amazing thing about it.

Floating in the brilliant violet liquid that filled the crystal tube was a gray mass, wrinkled and corrugated. This was divided by deep clefts into right and left hemispheres, which, in turn were separated into larger upper and smaller lower segments. White filaments ran through the violet liquid from its base toward the three rings or bands of green metal that encircled the cylinder.

In an instant, Larry realized that the gray mass was a human brain. The larger, upper part the cerebrum, the smaller mass at the back the cerebellum. And the white filaments were nerves, by means of

which this brain controlled its astounding, mechanical body!

A brain in a machine!

The violet liquid, it came to Larry in his trance of wonder, must take the place of blood, feeding the brain-cells, absorbing waste.

An eternal mind, within a machine! Free from the ills and weaknesses of the body. And devoid, too, of any pity, of any tender feelings. A cold and selfish mind, without emotion — unless it might worship itself or its mechanical body.

It was this monster that had spilt the pool of blood drying on the floor, near the door. And it was these glistening, green, snake-like tentacles that had crumpled the revolver into a broken mass of steel!

Abruptly the machine-monster darted forward, running swiftly upon its four legs of green metal. Slender tentacles reached out toward the shuddering girl at Larry's shoulder.

"Run!" Agnes gasped to him quickly. "It will kill you!"

The girl tried to push him back.

As she touched him, Larry recovered from his daze of wondering fear. Agnes was in frightful danger, and facing it with quiet courage. He must find a weapon!

WILDLY, HE looked about him. His eyes fell upon the tall, heavy wooden stool, upon which Agnes had been sitting.

"Get back!" he shouted to her.

He snatched up the stool, and swinging it over his head, sprang toward the machine of violet-filled crystal and glittering green metal.

"Stop!" Agnes screamed, in a terrified voice. "You can't . . . "

She had run before him. He seized her arm and swung her back behind him. Then he advanced warily toward the machine-monster, which had paused and seemed to be regarding him with sinister intentness, through its glistening crystal eye-lenses.

With all his strength, Larry struck at the crystal cylinder, swinging the stool like an ax. A slender, metallic green tentacle whipped out, tore the stool from his hands, and sent it crashing across the room, to splinter into fragments on the opposite wall.

Larry, sent off his balance, staggered toward the glittering machine. As he stumbled against the transparent tube that contained the brain, he clenched his fist to strike futilely at it.

A snake-like metal tentacle wrapped itself about him; he was hurled to the floor, to sprawl grotesquely among broken apparatus.

His head came against the leg of a bench. For a few moments he was dazed. But it seemed only a few seconds to him before he had staggered to his feet, rubbing his

bruised head. Anxiously, he peered about the room.

The machine-monster and Agnes were gone!

He stumbled back to the mass of apparatus in the center of the huge laboratory. Intently, he gazed into the upright pillar of crimson flame. Nothing was visible there.

"No, the other!" he gasped. "The violet is the way they went."

HE TURNED to the companion ray of violet radiance that beat straight down on the opposite side of the tiny, whirling planet. And in that motionless torrent of chill violet flame he saw them.

Tiny, already, and swiftly dwindling!

With green wings outspread, the machine-monster was beating swiftly upward through the pillar of purple-blue flame. And close against the crystal tube that contained its brain, was Agnes, held fast by the whip-like tentacles of glistening green metal.

Larry moved to spring after them, into the torrent of violet light. But sudden caution restrained him.

"I'd shrink, too!" he muttered. "And then where would I be? I'd be standing on the glass platform, I guess. And the thing flying off over my head!"

He gazed at the rapidly dwindling forms of Agnes Sterling and her amazing abductor. As it grew smaller, the machine-monster flew higher in the violet beam, until it was opposite the tiny, spinning planet.

The distance between the red and the violet rays was just slightly more than the diameter of the pigmy world. The sphere hung between them, one side of it a fraction of an inch from the red, the other as near the violet.

Opposite the elfin planet, the monster ceased to climb. It hung there in the violet ray, an inch from the surface of the little world.

And still it swiftly dwindled. It was no larger than a fly, and Larry could barely distinguish the form of the girl, helpless in the green tentacles.

Soon she and the monster became a mere greenish speck . . . Suddenly they were gone.

FOR A LITTLE time he stood watching the point where they had vanished, watching the red and the violet rays that poured straight down upon the crystal disks, watching the tiny, green-blue planet spinning so steadily between the bright rays.

Abruptly, he recovered from his fascination of wonder.

"What did she say?" he muttered. "Something about the monsters carrying off people to sacrifice to a rusty machine that they worship as a god! It took her—for that!"

He clenched his fists; his lips became a straight line of determination.

"Then I guess we try a voyage in the little plane. A slim chance, maybe. But decidedly better than none!"

He returned to the table, dropped on his knees, inspected the tiny airplane. A perfect miniature, delicately beautiful; its slim, small wings were bright as silver foil. Carefully, he opened the door and peered into the diminutive cabin. Two minute rifles, several Lilliputian pistols, and boxes of ammunition to match, lay on the rear seat of the plane.

"So we are prepared for war," he remarked, grinning in satisfaction. "And the next trick, I suppose, is to get shrunk to fit the plane. About three inches, she said. Lord, it's a queer thing to think about.!"

He got to his feet, walked back to the machine in the center of the room, with its twin pillars of red and violet flame, and the tiny world floating between them. He started to step into the violet ray, then hesitated, shivering involuntarily, like a swimmer about to dive into icy cold water.

Turning back to one of the benches, he picked up a wooden funnel-rack, and tossed it to the crystal disk beneath the violet ray. Slowly it decreased in size, until it had vanished from sight.

"Safe, I suppose," he muttered. "But how do I know when I'm small enough?"

AFTER A moment he picked up a glass bottle which measured about three inches in height, set it on the floor, beside the crystal disk.

"I dive out when I get to be the size of the bottle," he murmured.

With that, he leaped into the violet beam.

He felt no unusual sensation, except one of pleasant, tingling warmth, as if the direct rays of the sun were beating down upon him. For a moment he feared that his size was not being affected. Then he noticed, not that he appeared to become smaller, but that the laboratory seemed to be growing immensely larger.

The walls seemed to race away from him. The green-blue sphere of the tiny planet which he proposed to visit expanded and drew away above his head.

Abruptly fearful, alarmed at the hugeness of the room, he turned to look at the bottle he had placed to serve as a standard of size. It had grown with everything else, until it seemed to be about three feet high.

And it was swiftly expanding. It reached to the level of his shoulder. And higher!

He ran to the edge of the crystal disk, which now seemed a floor many yards across, and leaped

from its edge. It was a dozen steps to where he had left the bottle. And it was as tall as himself!

He started across the floor of the laboratory toward the table under which the toy plane stood. The incredible immensity of his surroundings awed him strangely. The walls of the room seemed distant, Cyclopean cliffs; the roof was like a sky. Table legs towered up like enormous columns.

It seemed a hundred yards across the strangely rough floor to the plane. As he drew near it, it gave him huge satisfaction to see that it was of normal size, correctly proportioned to his own dimensions.

HE PAUSED, as he reached the cabin's open door, to wonder at the astounding fact that a little while ago he had opened that door with a hand larger than his entire body now was.

"I guess this is my day of wonders!" he muttered. "Allah knows I had to wait long enough for it!"

First he examined the weapons in the cabin. There were two heavy sporting rifles and two .45 automatics, which, he supposed, had been intended for Agnes' use. And there was abundant ammunition.

Then he inspected the plane. It looked to be in excellent condition in every way. The gasoline and oil tanks were full.

He set about starting the motor, using the plane's inertia starter, which was driven by an electric motor. Soon the engine coughed, sputtered, and gave rise to a roaring, rhythmic note that Larry found musical.

When the motor was warm, he opened the throttle and taxied out from beneath the colossal table, and across the laboratory floor toward the Titanic mechanism in the center of the room. The disk of crystal was set almost flush with the floor, its edge beveled. The plane rolled easily upon it, and out into the Cyclopean pillar of violet flame.

Once more, Larry felt the sensation that everything about him, except the plane itself, was expanding inconceivably in size. Soon the laboratory's walls and roof were lost in hazy blue distance. He could distinguish only the broad, bright field formed by the surface of the crystal disk, with the floor stretching away beyond it like a vast plain. And above, the green-blue sphere of the tiny planet, bright on one side and dark on the other, so that it looked like a half-moon, immensely far-off.

AS HE WAITED, he noticed a curious little dial, in a lower corner of the instrument board, which he had not seen at first. One end of its graduated scale was marked *Earth Normal*, the other *Pygmy Planet Normal*. A tiny

black needle was creeping slowly across the scale, toward *Pygmy Planet Normal.*

"That's how we tell what size we are, without having to look at a bottle," he muttered.

When the area of the crystal platform appeared to be about half a square mile, he decided that he would now have sufficient space to spiral up the violet ray toward the planet. If he waited too long to start, the distance would become impossibly great.

He gave the little plane the gun. The motor thundered a throbbing song; the ship rolled smoothly forward over the polished surface, gained flying speed and took the air without a shock.

"Feels good to hold the stick again!" Larry murmured.

Making small circles to keep within the upright pillar of violet radiance, he climbed steadily and as rapidly as possible, keeping his eyes upon the brilliant half-moon of the Pygmy Planet.

The strangest flight in the annals of aviation! He was flying toward a goal that, a few minutes before, he could have touched. Toward a goal that, at the beginning of his flight, was only a few lengths of his plane away. And his size dwindled so rapidly as he flew that the planet seemed to swell and draw away from him.

As Larry and the plane grew smaller, the relative size of the violet ray increased, so there was no longer much danger of flying out of it. It seemed that he flew through a world of violet flame.

He met a curious problem in time. It is evident that time passes faster for a small animal than for a large one, because nerve currents require a shorter time in transit, and all thought and action is consequently speeded up. It took a hundred-foot dinosaur nearly a second to know that his tail had been pinched. A fly can get under way in time to escape a descending swatter. The Pygmy Planet rotated in a few seconds of Earth time; one of its inhabitants might have lived, aged, and died in the duration of a single day in our larger world.

SO LARRY FOUND that time seemed to pass more rapidly, or rather that the time of the world he had left appeared to move more slowly, as he adventured into smallness. He had been flying, it seemed to him, nearly an hour when he reached the level of the planet's equator.

Now it seemed a vast world, filling half the visible universe. He flew toward it steadily, until he knew by the fading before him of the violet flame which now seemed to fill all space, that he was near the edge of the ray. And as he flew, he watched the little scale, upon which the black needle was now

nearing the line marked *Pygmy Planet Normal.*

Circling slowly, keeping always on the level of the planet's equator, and near the edge of the violet ray, so as to be as close as possible to his landing place when he reached the proper size, he watched the creeping black needle.

Too, he scanned with eager eyes the planet floating before him. Bare, red deserts; narrow strips of green vegetation; shrunken, blue oceans; silvery lines of rivers, passed in fascinating panorama beneath his eyes. The rate of the planet's spinning seemed continually to lessen, with the changing of his own sense of time.

Agnes! Larry thought of her with a curious, eager pain in his heart. She was somewhere on that strange, ancient world, a prisoner of weird machine-monsters! Intended victim of a grotesque sacrificial ceremony!

Could he find her, in the vastness of an unfamiliar world? And having found her, would there be a chance to rescue her from her hideous captor? The project seemed insane. But Larry felt a queer, unfamiliar urge, which, he knew, would drive him on until he had discovered and saved her — or until he was dead.

AT LAST, when it seemed to Larry nearly three hours since he had begun this amazing flight, the crawling ebon needle reached the mark, *Pygmy Planet Normal.*

He flew out of the wall of violet flame toward the planet's surface. Before, the distance between the planet and the ray's edge had seemed only the fraction of an inch. Now it appeared to be many miles.

Abruptly the Pygmy Planet, which had seemed to be beside him, appeared to swing about, so that it was a change merely in his sensations. He was feeling the gravitation of the new world. It was pulling him toward it!

He cut the throttle, and settled the plane into a long glide, a glide that was to end upon the surface of a new planet!

In what seemed half an hour more, Larry had made a safe landing upon the Pygmy Planet. He had come down upon a stretch of fairly smooth, red, sandy desert, which seemed to stretch illimitably toward the rising sun, which direction Larry instinctively termed "east."

To the "west" was a line of dull green — evidently the vegetation along the stream. The ocher desert was scattered with sparse clumps of reddish, spiky scrub. Larry taxied the plane into one of those thickets. Finding canvas and rope in the cabin, he staked down the machine, and muffled the motor.

Then, selecting a rifle and a heavy automatic from the weapons in the cabin, and filling his pockets

with extra ammunition, he left the plane and set out with brisk steps toward the green line of vegetation.

"I'll follow along the river," he reasoned. "It may lead me somewhere and it will show the way back to the plane. I may come across something in the way of a clue. Can't go exploring by air, or I'll burn up all the gas and be stranded here!"

TO HIS SURPRISE, the water course proved to be an ancient canal, walled with crumbling masonry. Its channel was choked with mud and thorny, thick-leaved desert shrubs of unfamiliar variety; but a feeble current still flowed along it.

After some reflection, Larry set out along the banks of the canal.

He followed it for two days.

Curious straight bars of light were visible across the sky — a band of violet in the morning; one of crimson at evening. Their apparent motion was in the same direction as that of the sun. The bars of light puzzled him considerably before it occurred to him that they must be the red and violet rays.

"So you wait till evening, and then fly up into the red ray, to go home," he muttered. "But I may not need that information," he added grimly. "Seems to be a pretty big job to search a planet on foot, for one person. And I'm not going back without Agnes!"

In the afternoon of the second day, he came within view of a city. He could discern vast, imposing walls and towers of dark stone. It stood in the barren red desert, far back from the green line of the old canal. Larry left the canal and started wearily across toward it. He had covered several miles of the distance before he saw that the lofty towers were falling, the magnificent walls crumbling. The city was ruined, dead, deserted!

The realization brought him a great flood of despair. He had hoped to find people — friends, from whom he might get food, and information about this unfamiliar planet. But the city was dead.

Larry was standing there, in the midst of the vast red plain between ruined city and ruined canal. Tired, hungry, lonely and hopeless. He was looking up at the white "sun," trying to comfort himself with the thought that the brilliant luminary was merely a queer blue lamp, that he was upon a tiny experimental world in a laboratory. But the thought brought him no relief; only confusion and a sense of incredulity.

THEN HE SAW the machine-monster.

A glittering, winged thing of crystal and green metal, identical with the one he had encountered in the laboratory. It must already

have seen him, for it was dropping swiftly toward him.

Larry started to run, took a few staggering steps. Then he recalled the heavy rifle slung over his shoulder. Moving with desperate haste, he got it into his hands and raised it just as the monster dropped to the red sand a dozen yards away from him.

Steadily he covered the crystal cylinder within which the thing's brain floated in luminous violet liquid. His finger tightened on the trigger, ready to send a heavy bullet crashing into it. Then he paused, swore softly, lowered the gun.

"If I kill it," he murmured, "I may never find Agnes. And if I let it carry me off, it may take me where she is."

He walked toward the monster, across the red sand.

It stood uncertainly upon green metal legs, seeming to stare at him strangely with eye-like lenses. Its wings of thin green metal plates, were folded; its four green tentacles were twitching oddly.

Abruptly, it sprang upon him.

A green tentacle seized the rifle and snatched it from his hands. He felt the automatic pistol and the ammunition being removed from his pockets.

Then, firmly held in the flexible arms of green metal, he was lifted against the cylinder of violet liquid. The monster spread its broad emerald wings, and Larry was swiftly borne into the air.

In a few moments the wide ruins of the ancient city were spread below, with the green line of the choked canal cutting the infinite red waste of the desert beyond it.

The monster flew westward.

FOR A considerable time, nothing save barren, ocherous desert was in view. Then Larry's weird captor flew near a strange city. A city of green metal. The buildings were most fantastic—pyramids of green, crowned with enormous, glistening spheres of emerald metal. An impassable wall surrounding the city.

Larry had expected the monster to drop into the city. But it carried him on, and finally settled to the ground several miles beyond. The green tentacles released him, as the thing landed, and he sprawled beside it, dizzy after his strange flight.

As Larry staggered uncertainly to his feet, he saw that the monster had released him in an open pen. It was a square area, nearly fifty yards on each side, and fenced with thin posts or rods of green metal, perhaps twenty feet high. Set very close together, and sharply pointed at the top, they formed a a barrier apparently insurmountable.

In the center of the pen was a huge and strange machine, built of green metal. It looked very worn and ancient; it was covered with

patches of bluish rust or corrosion. At first it looked quite strange to Larry; then he was struck by a vaguely familiar quality about it. Looking closer, he realized that it was a colossal steam hammer!

Its design, of course, was unfamiliar. But in the vast, corroded frame he quickly picked out a steam chest, cylinder, and the great hammer, weighing many tons.

He gasped when his eyes went to the anvil.

A man was chained across it.

A man in torn, grimy clothing, fastened with fetters of green metal upon wrists and ankles, so that his body was stretched beneath the massive hammer. He seemed to be unconscious; upon his head, which was turned toward Larry, was a red and swollen bruise.

The monster which had dropped Larry within the pen rose again into the air. And Larry started forward, trying to remember just what Agnes had told him of a machine to which the monsters sacrificed.

This must be the machine—this ancient steam hammer!

As he moved forward, Agnes came into view.

SHE WALKED around the massive base of the great machine, carrying a bowl filled with a fragrant brown liquid. She stopped at sight of Larry, and uttered a little cry. The bowl fell from her hands, and the fragrant liquid splashed out on the ground. Her brown eyes went wide with delighted surprise; then a look of pain came into them.

"Larry, Larry!" she cried. "Why did you come?"

"To get you," he answered, trying to speak as lightly as he could. "And the best way I knew to find you was to let one of the monsters bring me. Cheer up!" But even to himself, his voice had a tone of discouragement.

She smiled wanly. "I don't see anything to be cheerful about." Her small face was set and a little white. "Dr. Whiting is going to be smashed under the hammer of this dreadful machine, whenever the steam is up. Then it is my turn. And yours. That's nothing to laugh about."

"But we aren't smashed yet!" Larry insisted.

"By the way, what was that in the bowl?" he went on, glancing down. "I forgot to bring lunch." He grinned.

She looked down, startled.

"Oh, Dr. Whiting's soup. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he'll never awake to eat it. There's plenty more. Come around here."

She picked up the bowl and led him around the base of the machine; then she filled the bowl again with the fragrant, red-brown liquid, from a tall urn of green metal. Larry took the dish eagerly

and gulped down the rather insipid and tasteless food.

"And the monsters worship this old steam hammer?" he inquired, when his hunger was appeased.

"Yes. I think the thing is worked by steam generated by volcanic heat. Anyhow, there isn't any boiler, and the steam pipe comes up out of the ground. You can see that. So it runs on, without any attention—though I guess the heat is dying down, since it is several days between blows of the hammer.

"And I guess the monsters have forgotten how they used to rule machines. They seem to have depended upon machines, even giving up their own bodies for mechanical ones, until the machine rules them.

"And when this old hammer kept pounding on through the ages, using volcanic steam, I guess they began to regard it as a sort of god. And when they got the idea of giving it sacrifices, it was natural enough to place the victims under the hammer."

THEY WENT BACK to Dr. Whiting who was chained across the anvil. He was still breathing, but unconscious. He had been injured in a struggle with the monsters, and his body was much emaciated. Agnes explained that he had been a prisoner in the pen for many months of the time of this world, waiting his turn to die; she said that the monsters had just completed the extermination of another race upon the Pygmy Planet, and were now turning to the greater world for victims.

Larry noticed that the great hammer was slowly rising in its guides, as the pressure of the steam from the planet's interior increased. In a few hours—just at sunset—it reached the top of its stroke.

The air above the pen was suddenly filled with glittering swarms of the green-winged monsters sweeping, slowly about, in measured flight, with strange order in their masses. They had come to witness the sacrifice!

With an explosive rush of steam, the hammer came down!

The ground trembled beneath the terrific blow; the roaring of escaping steam and the crash of the impact were almost deafening. A heavy white cloud shrouded the corroded green machine.

When the hammer slowly lifted, only a red smear was left . . .

Agnes had shrunk, trembling, against Larry's shoulder. He had put his arms about her and was holding her almost fiercely.

"My turn next," she whispered. "And don't try to fight them. It will only make them hurt you!"

"I can't let them take you, Agnes!" Larry cried, in an agonized tone. And the words seemed to leap out, of themselves, "Because I love you!"

"You do?" Agnes cried, in a thin, choking voice, pressing herself against him. "Ever since the first time you came to the laboratory . . . "

A score of the monster forms of violet-filled crystal and gleaming green metal had dropped into the pen. They tore Agnes from Larry's arms, hurling him roughly to the ground, at the bottom of the green metal fence. For some time he was unconscious.

WHEN HE HAD staggered painfully to his feet, it was night. The monsters were gone; the starless sky was black and empty. Calling out weakly, and stumbling about the pen, he found Agnes. She was chained where Dr. Whiting had been.

She was conscious, unharmed. For a time they talked a little, exchanging broken, inchoherent phrzses. Then they went to sleep, lying on the anvil, beneath that mighty hammer that was slowly lifting to strike another fearful blow.

When the "sun" had risen again, Larry brought Agnes some of the brown soup from the metal urn, which had been filled again. Then, when he had satisfied himself, he started clambering up the massive frame of the hammer.

If he could put it out of commission!

It was a difficult task. He slipped back many times, and finally had to choose another place to make the ascent. Twice he slipped and almost fell from a considerable height. But finally he reached the massive wheel of the valve which seemed to control the admission of steam into the cylinder above the hammer.

If he could but close that, the steam would be confined in the chest below. And when the pressure reached a certain point, something should happen!

The valve was not easy to turn; it seemed fixed with the corrosion of ages. For hours Larry wrestled with it. Then he left it, realizing that he must find something to use for a hammer. A vigorous search of the pen's hard earth floor failed to reveal any stone that would do. He turned his attention to the machine, and presently saw a slender projecting lever, high up on the side of the vast frame, which looked as if it had been weakened by corrosion. After a perilous climb, he reached the bar of green metal and swung his weight upon it. It broke, and he plunged to the ground with the bar in his hands.

CLAMBERING UP once more to the great valve, he hammered it until the rust that stiffened it was loosened. Then he struggled with the valve until it was closed.

"We'll see what happens!" he muttered.

Returning to the ground, he set to work to break the green metal fetters upon Agnes' wrists and ankles, using the broken lever as hammer and file.

For the greater part of six days he toiled at that task, while the great hammer rose slowly. But the green metal seemed very hard. One arm was free at the end of the second day, the other on the fourth. He had one ankle loose on the morning of the sixth day. But as evening came on, and the great hammer reached the top of its stroke, the fourth chain still defied him.

Before sunset, a swarm of the monsters appeared, wheeling on green wings. He was forced to leave the work, hiding his improvised file.

Agnes still lay across the anvil, to conceal from the monsters the fact that the chains were broken. Larry sat close beside her, nursing hands that were blistered and sore from his days of filing at the chains.

A sudden clatter came form the huge mechanism above them, and a sharp hiss of steam, which became louder.

"It works!" Larry whispered to Agnes. "The old valve held, and the steam can't get into the cylinder to smash us! But Allah knows what will happen when the pressure rises in that old steam chest!"

Darkness came. Dusk swallowed the wheeling machine-monsters. All night Larry and Agnes waited silently, together on the great anvil, listening to the hissing of steam from above, which was slowly becoming a shrill monotonous scream; monotonous, always higher, shriller.

The "sun" rose again. Still the green-winged monsters wheeled about. They came in glittering swarms, thousands of them. They came nearer the machine now, and flew about more swiftly, as if excited.

THEN IT happened.

There was a roar like thunder, and a colossal, bellowing explosion. The air was filled suddenly with scalding steam, and with screaming fragments of the bursting steam shest. In the midst of it all, Larry felt a crushing blow upon the head. And a blanket of darkness fell upon him . . .

"The monsters are all gone, darling," Agnes' voice reached him. "As though they were very much frightened. And a piece of the old hammer hit the fence and knocked a hole in it. You must go. Leave me . . . "

"Leave you?" Larry groaned, struggling to sit up. "Not a bit of it!" He touched his head gingerly, felt a swollen bruise.

Collecting a few fragments of the wrecked machine, to serve as tools, he fell to work again upon

Agnes' remaining chain. Already he had cut a deep grove in it. Two hours later, it was broken.

Carrying the metal urn of brown liquid, they crept out through the hole in the fence, which had been torn by the flying fragment of a broken casting of green metal. They left the wreck of the machine which a strange race had worshiped as a bloody god and hurried furtively into the desert of red sand.

Making a wide circuit about the fantastic city of green metal, which Larry had seen from the air, they struck out eastward across the desolate ocherous waste. The food in the urn, eaten sparingly, lasted until the end of the eighth day.

On the morning of the ninth, they came in view of the green line of the ancient canal. It was hours later that they staggered weakly over its wall of crumbling masonry, clambered down into the muddy, weed-grown channel, and drank thirstily of green, tepid water.

Larry found his old trail, beyond the canal. They followed it back. In the middle of the afternoon they stumbled up to the thicket of spiky desert growth, in which Larry had hidden the plane.

The machine was undamaged.

BEFORE SUNSET, Larry had removed the stake ropes, slipped the canvas cover from the motor, turned the plane around, inspected it, and examined the strip of smooth, hard red sand upon which he had landed.

Agnes pointed out the dim band of crimson across the sky, from north to south, slowly rising toward the zenith.

"That's the red ray," she said. "We fly into it."

"And a happy moment when we do," Larry rejoined.

He roused the motor to life.

As the bar of crimson light neared the zenith, the plane rolled forward across the sand and took off. Climbing steeply, Larry anxiously watched the approach of the red band. The gravitation of the Pygmy Planet seemed to diminish as he gained altitude, until presently he could fly vertically from it, without circling at all. He set the bow toward the scarlet bar across the sky before him.

And suddenly he was flying through ruby flame.

His eyes went to the little scale at the corner of the instrument board. He saw the little ebon needle waver, leave the mark designated *Pygmy Planet Normal* and start toward *Earth Normal.*

For what seemed a long time, he was wheeling down the crimson ray. A few times he looked back at Agnes, in the rear seat. She had gone to sleep.

Then a vast, circular field was below — the crystal platform.

Larry landed the plane upon it, taxied to the center and stopped there, with the motor idling. The laboratory, taking shape in the blue abyss about him, seemed to contract swiftly.

PRESENTLY THE plane covered most of the crystal disk. He taxied quickly off, stopped on the floor nearby, and cut the ignition. Agnes woke. Together they clambered from the plane's cabin and walked back into the crimson ray.

Once more the vast spaces of the room seemed to shrink, until it looked familiar once more. The Pygmy Planet, and the huge machine looming over them, dwindled to natural size.

Agnes, watching a scale on the frame of the mechanism, which Larry had not noticed, leaped suddenly from the red ray, drawing him with her.

"We don't want to be giants!" she laughed.

Larry drew a deep breath, and looked about him. Once more he was in his own world, and surveying it in his normal size. He became aware of Agnes standing close against him. He suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Wait a minute," she objected, slipping quickly from his arms. "What are we going to do about the Pygmy Planet? Those monsters might come again, even if you did wreck their god. And Dr. Whiting, poor fellow . . . But we musn't let those monsters come back!"

Larry doubled up a brown fist and drove it with all his strenght against the little globe that spun so steadily between the twin, upright cylinders of crimson and of violet flame. His hand went deep into it. And it swung from its position, hung unsteadily a moment, and then crashed to the laboratory floor then crashed to the laboratory floor. It was crushed like a ball of soft brown mud. It spattered.

"Now I guess they won't come back," Agnes said. "A pity to spoil all Dr. Whiting's work, though."

Larry was standing motionless, holding up his fist and looking at it oddly. "I smashed a planet! Think of it, I smashed a planet! Just the other—why it was just this evening, at the office, I was wishing for something to happen!"

Destroyers

by GREG D. BEAR

While first degree murder has been disapproved in nearly every civilization recorded in history, there have been many where certain exceptions have been sanctioned, within regulations. And the future may show instances, such as this one.

"YOU ARE THE man who destroys churches?" I asked, poising my pencil over a clean sheet of note paper.

"Yes," said the young, pleasant-looking man before me. "I do."

"And what are your reasons for destroying churches?" I scribbled as he spoke.

"Reasons? There are many. Let's see . . . mmm. Yes, for one, churches have sought to hold people under their power for centuries, even eons. They have sought to impress their often archaic ideas on people by any and all means—through force, mingling of societies, legislations, anything." He smiled as I wrote. "You are doing an article?"

"Perhaps," I replied. "When did you go before the computer to be licensed?"

"Four months ago. There was a long line of people, many different complaints and ideas. Some were licensed; most weren't. These fools who wish to exterminate a neighbor because he cracks his egg at the small end get nowhere with the computer, of course. It only accepts legitimate—and well worded—queries for licenses, of course."

"And you destroy synagogues, monasteries, and temples?"

"Of course."

"But not the Buildings of the New Religion?"

"No, I have no complaint against them."

"Thank you," I said.

He acknowledged with a smile and handshake. "When you get your article finished, send me a copy of the magazine. I would enjoy seeing what you write."

"Very well," I replied. "If I sell it."

"Oh, no doubt you will, if you're any writer at all. Many people are interested in church destroyers these days."

I left the church-destroyer's office and went downtown on my next mission. I thought deeply on what the c.d. had said, and came to many interesting conclusions. They were transferred to my notebook as soon as I grasped them.

I entered the office of the communist-destroyer. In my notebook I made sure not to confuse him with the church destroyer when I abbreviated. I put him down as cm.d.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. He was a thin man with large eyes and nervous skin, with a face which can be described only as loose. He did not smile, but he did not frown, either.

"You destroy communists?" I asked, pencil over notebook.

"Yes. Every damn one of them. Why?" Did I detect a hint of a frown? No . . . perhaps just a minor throat irritation. I prepared to switch on my shield, just in case.

"I write," I replied. "Articles, stories, books, and such."

"Oh. Be careful when you leave the building, my friend. There is a man down the street a ways who destroys writers." His eyes flashed.

"I am a government writer," I said, and produced the small counterfeit card. "To continue. Why do you destroy communists?"

"Because they wish to take us all over. They're clever, too, and they could do it if it wasn't for us."

"There is a group?"

"Naturally. It isn't too large, of course—" he lied, obviously—"but it's enough to keep them from getting too strong all at once."

"How do you tell a communist?" I scribbled furiously.

"Normally we get calls from people who report their neighbors or something. Then we check out the reports—there's a stiff penalty in hitting normal people, of course—and move in if they're valid. You'd be surprised how many false reports we get. Probably the communists do it themselves, give reports, I mean—just to get at us." His face was red. He spoke in a tense voice. I readied one free finger over my shield switch.

"Fine. Thank you very much, and success."

He smiled weakly and opened the door for me. "Careful of that writer-destroyer!" he warned and I shook my head.

I took the monorails to Jayark-Mirie and noted with interest that two men shot each other on car 34-c. I wonder who they were even now, but nobody ever finds out unless one of the destroyers isn't really a destroyer. If he's a normal person, they raise quite a fuss.

In Jayark, two men started battling it out on the streets and everybody automatically flipped on their shields. I believe only one man was killed that time, but I didn't really notice.

I interviewed the conservative-destroyer in his home.

"You destroy conservatives?" I asked.

"Yes, mm hmm. Conservatives, John Birchers, Nazis, and so on. You a writer?"

I nodded. "Why?" I asked.

"Why? Why what?"

"Why do you destroy conservatives?"

"Because they think they're right and no one else is. I can't stand that. It makes me sick."

"Why didn't you become a church-destroyer, or a communist-destroyer, or somebody like that?"

"I only have one choice of license and occupation, of course. I chose this one—don't know really why. I just dislike old fogies with polluted brains functioning at half mast in reverence for the dear departed good old days."

"Thank you."

The last person I interviewed was the atheist-destroyer. He was an aged gentleman, dressed in a trim gray suit and carrying a fine cherry cane with gold tip. He had a sour face and a frown of the true avenger.

"You kill atheists?"

"I kill atheists." He had a rough, grating voice sounding like gravel tinking on windows.

"Why?"

"Because it's God's law. They hate all honest religioners, they do, and anyone who doesn't think like them is nuts. In their opinion, of course. Bunch of twisted punks, all of them." I thanked him and left the house. The monorail trip back to Brighton was quick and silent, giving me little time to organize my notes. I did that when I arrived at my hotel.

I spent three hours re-wording and correcting and doing the final draft. Then I sent my report and query into the computer.

I recieved my license today, along with the blank entrance form for purchasing a weapon.

I'm licensed to destroy destroyers.

THE MAN WHO AWOKE

by LAURENCE MANNING

(author of **Voice of Atlantis, Seeds From Space**)

3. The City of Sleep

Humanity had been in a crisis when Winters awoke in the year 10,000 A. D.; and while he knew that he was no miraculous savior, his presence there had helped to overthrow a tyranny that would have destroyed the spirit of man had attempts at a revolt continued to fail. What would come of this new beginning? For Winters, who had mastered the secret of suspended animation back in the twentieth century, there was no need to try to reason out the answer. He could sleep five thousand years, then awake and see for himself. And now, he awoke in the year 15,000 . . .

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This is the third of five stories, each complete in itself, which ran in *WONDER STORIES* during 1933, under the over-all heading of *The Man Who Awoke.* The first tale bore the series title, while the second was titled, *Master of the Brain.* The present story can be considered to have been derived from an earlier tale, *The City of the Living Dead,* which was LAURENCE MANNING'S first appearance in a science fiction magazine. Collaborating with Fletcher Pratt, Manning's debut copped the cover of the final issue of *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES* (May 1930); the magazine continued, of course, but the next issue saw SWS combined with *AIR WONDER STORIES,* to start Volume Two as *WONDER STORIES.* The present tale is not, however, just a repetition of the earlier story.

TWO YOUNG PERSONS leaned against the balustrade at the top of the tallest tower in Niagara City and looked out over the countryside. From where they stood they could see many miles in every direction, for the tower was two thousand feet in height and the city itself was built at some considerable elevation above the surrounding terrain. At their feet stretched the glass pavements and white buildings of the city, terminating in the surrounding white walls — a perfect circle with a radius of two miles. Beyond that was wilderness: unexplored in detail, though generally known from ancient maps prepared in the days when the human race dwelt in individual homes scattered among the fields and woods below.

It was a fair scene and the clear spring air and bright cloudless sky made the prospect more delightful still. Yet on the dark face of the man was set an expression of hopeless sorrow and the young woman's mouth was bent down in a sullen, petulant scowl. Both were dressed in fur-tipped silk of soft hues, according to the custom of the year 15,000 A.D. — the one in knee-length breeches and close-fitting hose and the other in flowing pajama-like trousers and jacket.

The clothing would have seemed uncomfortably thin for February weather in northern New York State ten thousand years before, but the climate had long since changed. With the temperature had also changed the appearance of people: the face of the girl was of the color of old mahogany and eyes and hair were so dark a brown as to look almost black, while the delicately molded hand that rested on the parapet was rich copper above and pale pink in the palm. The man was even darker of skin than she. He shifted restlessly from one foot to the other and his serious young face turned toward his companion.

"And is that your last word, Jalna?"

"Yes, Eric. I think you are being very silly about it all! Why can't you be like anyone else? Why do you have this unnatural desire to live you life haphazardly? Other people are only too glad to have their lives arranged in decency and comfort!"

The man groaned aloud.

"It isn't that! How many times must I explain myself before I realize it is only a waste of breath? There are others who feel as I do, or there would be no attendants for the dream-machines the rest of the city sleeps in! And what can be the end of it? Take our own single city, for the rest of the world is about the same, if not worse, how many people are alive . . . er . . . really alive and awake? Just four hundred and thirty by the last count. And these few people must feed themselves and provide electrical energy and control the dream records for more than one million sleepers!"

JALNA SHRUGGED her pretty shoulders.

"What of it? Fifty men can run the automatic machinery of the entire city."

"All very well—for now. But suppose you and I are operated on; next week some other people; then still more and so forth for the next ten years—the time will come when the fifty people are not available . . . and besides . . . "

"What is it now?"

"Oh nothing . . . only that there hasn't been one child born in America City for seven months."

There was a moody silence.

"I don't suppose I've changed your mind a particle?"

She shook her head.

"Well, I won't do it—even if you do!"

"Very well, Eric. I shall have a life record made of you and shall have my own life arranged just as though you were my husband—so it really doesn't matter to me. Only . . . of course, I'd rather you were lying beside me during the years and sharing my dreams."

"Jalna! I can't bear it . . . to see you one of those still, wire-meshed forms—never to move again! Muscles wasted away, face fallen in, emaciated, mummified—can't you see how horrible it will be?"

"Nonsense! I shall be climbing mountains, hunting lions in Africa, playing hostess at glittering social functions, eating intimate breakfasts with you . . . living with you . . . while I seem to be lying on the couch in the dream palace—where are you going? . . . Eric!"

But Eric had turned abruptly and made off along the balcony and down through the building to the street. With a choking heart he found his way through the streets

and through the gates to the green country outside the city. Head down and hands thrust deep in his pockets he tramped on and on, unseeingly. An hour passed and he was miles away from the city, up the great glass roadway that had been built imperishably by those ancient men who still used the surface of the land to travel over.

At the age of twenty-five, mealtimes are events not to be lightly ignored. Eric began to feel hungry. He looked about him, puzzled to say just where he was, for he had walked far and blindly. The road stretched before and behind him and the wilderness had crept close to its borders. Not the woods of oak and birch that had once covered this northern country — but the wilderness of 15,000 A.D., after the tropics had crept north.

The glacial remnants of the last ice-age had finally melted (after Greenland had lost its enormous ice-cap and the oceans had risen thirty feet or more) and palms flourished where New York City had once been. Their roots had burst through into the forgotten subways and tropical ferns and mosses covered the broken buildings with green. Eric looked around him at a jungle, dank and dripping even now with recent winter rains. What was the use of going farther? He turned and started back and as he did so observed something move in the woods on his right.

The thought rushed into his mind that some wild animal might be there and he realized the folly of his venturing so far from the city on foot. He glanced overhead, but no airship was near enough to signal — indeed only one was visible, far on the eastern horizon. It was a still day and he heard clearly the stealthy rustle of undergrowth. With pounding heart he set off at a run back toward the city — many miles distant.

HE HAD GONE perhaps fifty yards when three gaunt beasts appeared on the glass pavement in front of him and he stopped in a panic. From pictures he had seen he recognized them as wolves — and bigger than he expected. They came on at a lope — not straight toward him, but two on one side of the road and one along the other. He thought swiftly and had decided to try to reach the nearest tree when he heard a human voice behind him!

"Stay in the middle of the road!"

Then he heard footsteps and saw the wolves hesitate and two of them sat back on their haunches, tongues lolling out. There was a sharp "ping!" behind him and one of the wolves leaped three feet straight into the air and turned to bite its haunch fiercely. Then he

heard another "ping!" and a third, upon which a second wolf leaped in hurt surprise.

And now his savior stood beside him — an old gray-bearded man in strange leather clothes. But the face! It was that of a man from another world — a lean face with thin arched nose and white! Not the smooth, swart features of the men he knew! It was as if a twentieth century American should have met an ancient Babylonian fresh from that city of the Hanging Gardens — something indefinable set this man apart. And then he noticed the long bony fingers ending in unkempt nails. They held a piece of metal ending in a tube. Eric knew this, of course, for a weapon — but such as he had never seen.

"Can you pull back this lever, young man?"

Eric took the air-gun and found the lever required all his young strength. He handed back the recharged weapon and the old man nodded grimly.

"Now we will go a little closer and give those wolves a shock!"

At fifty feet distance the old man stopped and his finger pulled the trigger. At such a close range the lead bullet penetrated the flesh of a shoulder and made a serious wound. With a howl of pain one beast set off through the woods and a second shot, fortunately striking the eye of another, stretched it dead on the pavement. The third animal slunk out of sight into the forest.

Eric wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"I owe you my life, old man! What can I do to repay you? What is your name?"

"My name is Winters — Norman Winters. You can more than repay me if you will guide me to the nearest house where I can get food and shelter."

"That I will gladly do, Winters.

"By the Brain!" he almost shouted in amazement. "You have teeth!" And he started away a pace or two in alarm.

WINTERS WAS nonplussed. "Teeth? Naturally! And what of it?"

"Only animals have teeth!"

"What are you saying! . . . Why, you have none, eh? I hadn't noticed. Men used to have teeth you know."

"Oh," said Eric in relieved tones. "You are a throwback, is that it? My friend Thorley has blue eyes, at that. But teeth . . . I haven't heard of a case reported in the last ten centuries!"

Winters was cautiously silent.

"How does it happen you sprang so fortunately out of the wilderness?" and he eyed the stranger with distrust and curiosity.

"I might ask in return how it

happens that you are here unarmed and on foot!"

Eric laughed and then, remembering why he was here, frowned and sighed.

"I do not want to join the Sleepers and . . . the girl I love does! That is my case in a nutshell, Winters."

The old man gave him a puzzled glance and seemed to be musing upon Eric's words.

"Oh, I dare say it sounds absurd! To me the whole thought of sleeping away one's life has always seemed unpleasant. If dreaming under the machine is as good as living one's actions and life, then what is the use of all human existence? Can you understand me at all—or do you perhaps resent such a radical opinion?"

"Good God!" said the old man very solemnly.

"What's that?" said Eric, who had never heard the expression.

"Nothing—nothing! Go on! I understand your attitude very well."

"O-o-oh! Is that it? Are you a . . . deserter?"

"I don't know what you mean by that word."

"No offense intended! After all, you saved my life and I'm not likely to betray you. I mean are you one of the scientist class who deserted the machines? There have been such, you know and . . . well . . . you were here in the wilderness and all that . . ."

"Young man, mine is a strange story. Do you finish yours and answer my questions and . . . perhaps I will tell you my history."

"Oh . . . all right, then. I was to marry Jalna of our city and she wants a conventional marriage. We were to be operated on and spend our lives together dreaming in the machine. We quarrelled about it and I lost my temper and came for a walk. Went a bit farther than I intended and here I am. That's all."

"Not quite, perhaps. Do I understand that it is the customary way of living that one should be operated on and dream in a machine?"

Eric stared in astonishment. "Why of course!"

"Then how does it come that any are left awake—like yourself?"

"I am of the scientist class—they devote their lives to tending the sleepers. But surely you must know all this!"

"I did not know it—presently you will understand why. I cannot understand what the inducement can be for a man to dream instead of living."

"Oh, as to practical matters, such as pleasures and necessities, the dream machines give one a better life than nature and chance could offer."

WINTERS DREW himself up and sniffed the clean, crisp air. "Do you mean to tell me a dream machine offers anything to recompense you for giving up this good earth and the sky set with clouds and the green of trees and the glory of sunshine?"

"In the dream machines it is always sunshine and the dreamers draw as deep a breath of good air as we do right now and feast their eyes on as fair a scene! What manner of man are you to ask such questions?"

"But how can that be?"

"Very simply. What you see is merely what your eye signals over nerves to your brain, is it not? Well, in the dream machines the eye-nerves are stimulated in precisely the same way. So are the nerves of smell, of taste, of hearing and the entire surface of the body's tactile nerves."

"Go on! How is this done?"

"Oh, it is a surgical operation. The nerve ends are connected to fine wires and the wires lead to the control room from each dreamer. Here a complete set of sensations is sent out from a number of master records and so far as the dreamer is concerned he seems to be living a complete life. Before he enters he determines what sort of thing he wishes to experience. Some live the lives of great explorers and fight wild beasts in the wilderness; others seem to invent great scientific instruments and actually acquire a complete knowledge of any subject they wish; others make trips in rocket ships to Mars or Venus and there go through incredible adventures on those grotesque and almost uninhabitable worlds. Jalna wants to dream a life of ease and homely comfort with occasional adventures and dangers that are so arranged as to result happily—more to enhance the pleasures of peace than for any other reason."

"Good God! Is the world gone mad!"

"I won't go into the dream house with her," Eric went on, "so she is having a record made with my image in it. To all intents and purposes she will marry me whether I am there or not—and will live out her entire life as my wife."

A sudden suspicion passed through Winters' mind that he was being the victim of a jest. For several silent minutes he walked along, glancing at his companion's face from time to time. But his scrutiny left him as puzzled as ever, for never a sadder nor obviously desperate an expression had he seen. Could this impossible story be actually true? What then had come upon a world once more or less sane? If the dream was as good as the reality—what merit remained in action? Though, at that, the thing had a certain plausibility . . .

"I WILL TELL you my story," he said with sudden decision. And as they walked along that ancient glass highway he spoke of his youth thirteen thousand years before and of the world as it was then. He told how he had solved the secret of suspended animation and had built a chamber lead-lined far under the earth and risen after three thousand years to find a world changed beyond recognition. He told of his unpleasant welcome and final escape back to the chamber. He went on to describe his next awakening five thousand years ago and the part he had taken to free the world from the domination of the Machine Brain.

"But I know about that!" exclaimed Eric. "It's in the history records! You are the wilding that saved the world!"

"Yes, and now I awake, after five thousand years, to see the results of that saving! I find what? Great social and scientific strides taken by an enlightened humanity? Pah! I find the most disgusting and vicious custom mankind could imagine set up as convention! If the world sleeps what hope can there be of progress? Without progress what use can there be in living?"

"I don't understand exactly," replied Eric. "Yours is a strange philosophy. And another thing, if you don't mind, where are your scars?"

"My scars?"

"You have slept for thousands of years, you say. Well then, when our sleepers are brought back to waking, as is occasionally done, the scars of their operations show very plainly. You have none."

"My sleep was dreamless — as yours is at night."

"What! By drugs, then?"

Winters nodded. "You find it difficult to believe, I suppose. I assure you that your tale is just as impossible to my ears!"

They came in sight of the city just then and Winters gasped at the sheer white beauty of it. Eric was reminded of his Jalna — so soon to be lost to him forever — and sighed despondently.

"Perhaps you had better take explosives and destroy the dream-machines!"

"What are you saying, old man! Men die for such thoughts!"

"Better death than . . . worse!"

"But life in the palaces is not worse than death, surely!"

"Young man, I have had experience in many periods of this human life and I assure you that there is no period in past history that would not condemn this present custom. Moreover, what of the future? What of the time, which must surely come, when there are no more scientists to tend the machines? Shall the race perish?"

"Of course, there is that side of it. I've thought of that myself . . . "

"How many sleepers are there in your city?"

"Over a million . . . and only four hundred or so awake to tend them. Oh, I know, I know!"

"And is the rest of the world like this?"

"Yes."

"Then it is almost too late to save the world. Something must be done at once! Don't you see it yourself?"

Eric was silent a moment. "What should be done, then?" he said at last.

"Start a city of the living and leave these dreaming corpses!"

"How horrible! Your words offend every precept and scruple of my training! And yet . . . There is something plausible about the idea. But what would history think of us—deserting our charges!"

"Let me speak for history! She will praise you for a brave action. She will point out that moral cowardice on your part would have doomed the race. Only your desertion can make history possible, for otherwise the race of humans is finished here and now. A few more years of dwindling numbers will spell the end."

"Well, let me think of it awhile. Here we are at the city."

2

BEFORE THEM towered the great encircling wall and they passed through the gate and into the broad streets, flanked with such architecture as Winters had never dreamed in his wildest hopes. Here was progress! The entire city had been designed as a unit and at the center rose the huge and graceful fret-work of the dream palace. Its over-all shape was roughly pyramidal, but by blending color and form this was not at once apparent—the eye merely felt a vague symmetry which the reason later could demonstrate. Ten thousand pinnacles lent their frosty points to form the whole and flying buttresses and airy bridges lightened the effect and made the building seem unreal and as unsubstantial as froth.

The entire structure was of colored glass—not transparent, but in opaque pastel shades. Leading up to this breathtaking center, lesser buildings flanked the street and certainly gave the general effect of being part of one theme, though Winters could not at first sight understand how this was done, for no two buildings were similar in design or form.

But one thing impressed itself on his mind more than this beauty.

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This was the absence of people. In five minutes' walking, they saw one human being cross the road far ahead and disappear again. The city was almost silent and looked dead and deserted, an effect which gave the buildings a cold and lifeless look. *There is nothing,* Winters thought to himself, *sadder than a silent street.*

"I shall take you to the apartment of my friends," said Eric. "Four of us live together there and . . . none of us like the dream-machines!"

He lead the way inside a building of frosty green and up an automatic elevator to a room near the top of the building. All three of his friends were in, as it happened. A tall lean youth with harsh-modelled features, almost black, was introduced as Starfax, a mechanical engineer; a short, rather fat, and especially dark, young man was Antar, a biologist and surgeon in training; while the third, whose restless blue eyes and nervous hands betrayed the man of action, and whose blond head was set like a rock on the huge bulk of his body, was named Thorley. His face was light bronze in color and he presented a startling—almost freakish—contrast to the others in the room.

"His name is Winters," introduced Eric, and Antar stepped forward with professional interest in his eyes. "He's quite weak and needs rest and food . . ."

"So I can see without your telling me," said he of the goggles, already shouldering his friend aside. "We can hear the rest of your story later. He must have attention at once!" And in five minutes Winters found himself partially unrobed and, weary to the point of collapse, lying on a soft bed of some rubbery composition being told to drink some medicine. Ten minutes later he was fast asleep, whereupon Antar the healer left his patient and rejoined his companions in the other room.

Eric was telling the others what had happened that day and was repeating Winters' strange story. "I'd like to see the motor that stood up five thousand years!" said Starfax doubtfully. "It could be done, I suppose, but . . ."

"But what could he have been thinking of—to sleep dreamlessly all that time. I should have been bored to death!" Thus Thorley of the blond hair.

ALL THREE looked toward Antar, who pursed his lips judgematically.

"It could be done," he decided. "We have known about some of the effects of cosmic rays for centuries, but no one seems to have gone into this particular side of it. I can say definitely that he shows symptoms which might result from

such an experience — I've seen them myself. On the whole, I rather believe him. He looks quite different from a modern man, too. Has hair growing all over his chest, and, believe it or not, teeth!"

There was a general raising of eyebrows and Eric felt impelled to defend the intelligence of his elderly friend, lest his companions think him a mere savage.

"And what did he think of our present civilization?"

Eric grew red and his mouth hardened. "He thinks it rather revolting — wants us all to desert the sleepers and start up life in the wilderness."

Thorley's eyes gleamed eagerly and he made a half gesture of approval, but paused at the general chorus of horror from his other friends. Then Eric spoke bitterly of the almost vanishing birth rate of the city and Thorley thundered bluntly of "foolish conventions that were stifling the human race and curbing all adventure." It was a fair fight, two against two, and the reformers had the advantage of attack. Antar and Starfax were more than half convinced even before Eric broke the news of his quarrel with Jalna. When he told them of her decision to enter the sleep machines there was a solemn silence.

"We really must do something," said Starfax to the begoggled biologist.

"I suppose so," the latter replied. "But what?"

"I've been thinking about this thing for several hours," said Eric. "I believe I know what we could do. In the first place, we have no grudge against the sleepers, have we? We want no harm to come to them. All we really demand is that the world shall not cease living: that there shall continue to be a human race. Well, then, listen to me . . ."

IT WAS twenty-four hours later when Winters awoke. Every muscle ached, but his head was clear and he felt a keen hunger which Antar, happening in at his awakening, provided for with an abundant meal. The food was one single piece of creamy substance, weighing about a pound, crisp and delicious to the palate and washed down with a clear warm drink the flavor of which was new to Winters. In some ways it reminded him of ale — but equally so of salted milk. Whatever it was, it was invigorating and refreshing. Winters dressed and asked his physician if he might not now set out to explore the city and study the "customs of the Future", as he put it. It was mid-afternoon and the sun sent slanting rays into the bedroom and through the window he could see it gleaming and reflecting from a million pinnacels and points. As he looked a tiny air-

ship settled slowly and lazily over the buildings and down out of sight.

"That is the afternoon express from across the Atlantic," said Antar, following his gaze. "It is small — for there are few travellers these days."

Winters' face hardened in remembrance of what Eric had told him. "I must see the dream palace," he said firmly.

Starfax was in the next room and he joined them in the elevator, eager to see what impression five thousand years of progress would have on this ancient of days. As they emerged to the street Thorley's great figure loomed up beside them and the party of four proceeded at a gentle saunter toward the great building that dominated the center of the city.

"Where is Eric today?" asked Winters.

"Busy. We will not see him until sunset."

"He told us about the wolves yesterday," put in the blond giant. "May I see the weapon you used?"

Winters smilingly passed over his air-pistol and Thorley's huge fingers pawed it and turned it to an accompaniment of surprised grunts. He passed it back. "We can do better than that, old man!"

"Oh, as to that, so could we in my day. This pistol, however, requires no chemicals or explosives — that's its only advantage. And it worked, you know!"

But by now they were approaching the portals of the dream-palace and in awed silence Winters viewed its unearthly beauty. The entrance hall occupied half the entire ground floor and was set all about with elaborate counters. But one attendant was visible.

Starfax had been amusedly following Winters' gaze.

"A thousand years ago this hall was a crowded place of business!"

Winters shuddered.

His three young friends conducted him directly to a bank of automatic elevators and after a few minutes in one they filed forth upon a huge floor space broken occasionally by low Gothic columns. It must have been several acres in extent and in every direction were set thousands of stone tables, and upon each table rested a curious mound of strange texture and shape. Winters' gasp of surprise at the sight was delayed a few moments, for it was not at once apparent that these still motionless mounds were human beings. Over each, like a silver webbing, was a shroud of fine wires — so minute as to be almost invisible singly.

In awe and horror he approached the nearest sleeper and observed that the chest slowly rose and fell — though slightly — and that the wires grew from the face like hairs

in a beard. Over the eyes was set a bright cover and the table was pierced in several places to take the bundles of fine wires and lead them out of sight. But most startling of all was the terribly emaciated and wasted appearance of the bodies. The arms were mere skin and bone and the chest was ribbed like a hungry dog's. The faces — what could be seen of them — reminded him of the mumies in the Egyptian room at the Museum.

"That's old Vintalling you are looking at," said Antar. "He was a scientist. Served in biology for forty years and joined the sleepers only six months ago."

He gazed reflectively down at the quiet figure.

"It's a curious thing to look at him now . . . if I remember his record rightly, he imagines himself a young man of twenty having one grand debauch after another. Strange taste for a reputable scientist! I'm really not supposed to tell you, though: Such information is strictly private."

"And how do you know it, then?"

"Oh — all medicals are ex-officio attendants here. There's many a wife lying trustfully beside her husband and dreaming a peaceful domestic life under the firm belief that her husband is doing the same, when he is doing nothing of the sort, but dreaming of whole harems instead!"

"And could he be accused of unfaithfulness in his dreams?"

"But certainly! The law considers the chosen dream even more a voluntary action than some chance happening while awake. But such a question is highly technical and seldom arises. Once a sleeper, always a sleeper, as we say. In fact, the operation unfits a person for any other form of life. The eyes are destroyed and mechanical substitutes are not satisfactory for the waking life."

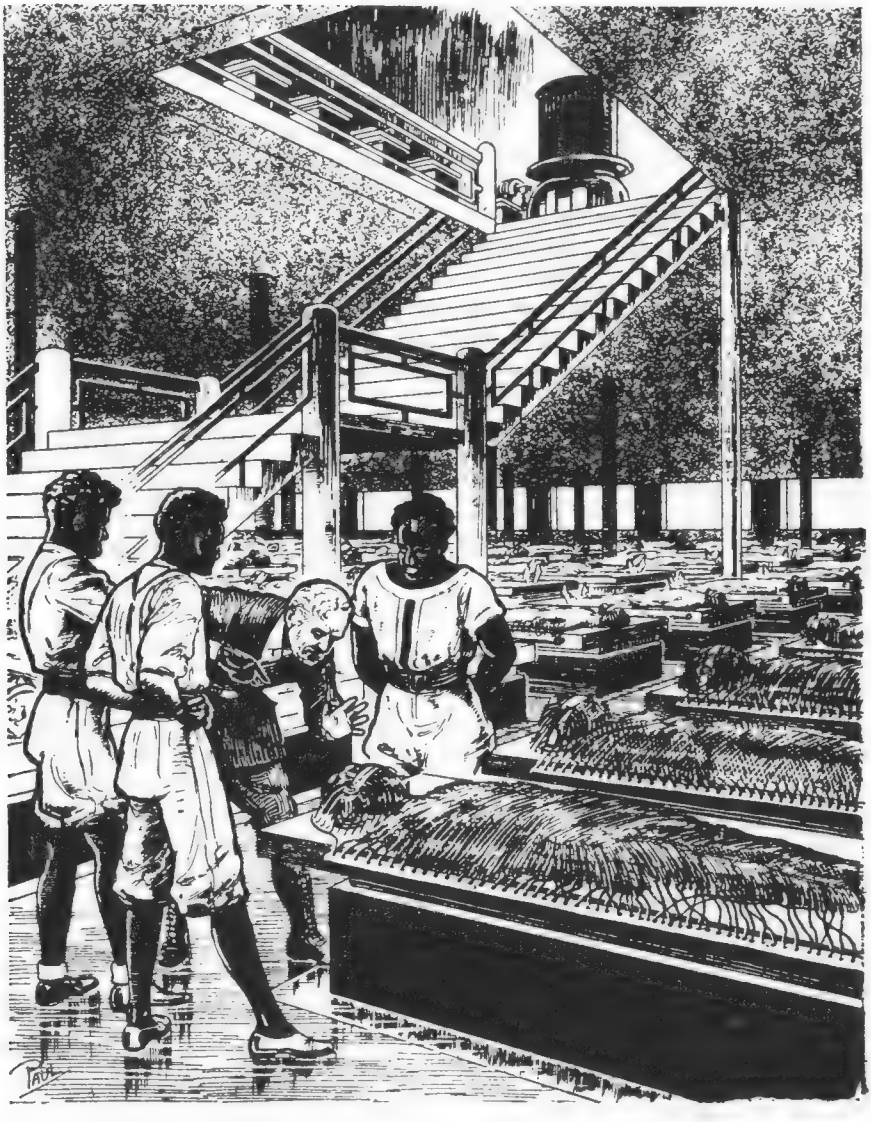
"And how are they kept alive? Do you feed them?"

"Of course not! A current of negative electricity passes through their bodies and provides all the energy they need — the tissues thus never become acid to the point of fatigue."

Winters had a sudden thought: "How long will they live here?"

"About as long as if they were awake," replied Antar. "The bodies near the last become emaciated to such an extent that ... well, to me at least they are revolting!" and he shuddered as if at some inner vision.

AND NOW THE four waking ones inspected floor after floor of sleeping figures — rising toward the very top of the dream palace — and after several hours of climbing and inspecting Winters found himself on the top of the same tower that Eric and Jalna had stood on



(illustration by Frank R. Paul)

the day before. But now at the end of day the lights were showing softly here and there through the city and the streets showed dusky, although up above where they stood the sun's beams still streamed over pinnacle and point. Winters gazed down and noted how few were the city lights below and thought of the untold hundreds of thousands of quiet forms that lay stretched out in the building beneath his feet.

"How could human beings ever have got started in such a suicidal course?" he asked. "Who knows the history of the sleep-palace?"

"Eric is the man for that sort of thing. By the way, he should be at our rooms by now. Had we not better start down again?"

The apartment of the four friends was empty when they arrived after traversing the deserted streets. Winters was greatly interested to observe the simple preparations for the evening meal. A compact box with a hopper on the top was set in operation and after ten minutes Antar opened the door below and drew forth a tray full of the crisp white food and a tall beaker of the gray liquor.

"Wonderful! But how is it done?"

Antar lifted the hopper and Winters saw the raw material—a few shovels of sand and gravel!

"Its simplicity is deceptive," he explained. "The sand is broken down in a furnace inside the cabinet by enormous heat and the atoms stripped apart into protons and electrons. Then these are recombined in a controlled stream to form our ambrosia and nectar. The first models of this machine weighed thousands of tons and were very intricate and difficult to operate—not until fairly recently was the process refined to the point where small individual machines were possible."

"Nectar . . . ambrosia . . . why, that is the food of the gods!"

"Exactly! So they were named in your day, weren't they? Or was that before you? They are carefully determined substances and represent perfection in food for the human animal."

THEY SAT DOWN, all four, to the meal which Winters again found delicious. He noticed with interest the rim of pink and white cartilage which served his companions in lieu of teeth. At a glance it was not an obvious change and at a distance quite resembled a set of teeth, but in detail (Winters was circumspect in his observations) he found it vaguely shocking and disturbing. He never got over this feeling. His companions, in turn, eyed his own incisors with frank interest, though without comment.

Just as they were finishing their meal the door opened and Eric

entered. His face was flushed with excitement and he greeted them abstractedly, as though obsessed with some overpowering interest.

"Five!" he announced cryptically and his three friends nodded and smiled to each other. Winters was bewildered and glanced from one to the other for enlightenment.

"Five what, may I ask?"

"All in good time," replied Eric. "For the present even you may not know. What have you all been doing today?"

Winters' thoughts reverted to the million silent forms in the dream palace. "We have been seeing the city of the living dead!"

"And what did you think of it?"

"I think that such horrors would never have been believed in my day. Tell me, Eric how does it happen that the world even came to adopt such a custom?"

The young man pushed back his chair and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. "It was natural enough. Human nature has always been wishful for ease and comfort and afraid of change and the unpredictable hammer blows of fate. In the sleep palace each man and woman seems actually to be doing the things he or she most desires. Life there is a regulated thing—if one wishes for it there can be arranged desperate situations and seeming dangers, but always the denouement is happy. If your wish in life be to enjoy it to the utmost, then there is no comparison between sleeping and waking. And this is really the wish of most people—was it not so in your day?"

"True," replied Winters thoughtfully. "But tell me how the process ever came into being."

"It began with the blind. A famous surgeon invented artificial eyes and then a clever playwright found a way to present dramas to the blind upon a sort of recording device. So perfect did the sense of reality about these dramas become that a few people actually had their healthy eyes removed in order to enjoy them. That was the beginning."

"And then?"

"Then the sense of sound followed that of sight. To this was added the senses of smell and taste and finally feeling. So enthusiastic were the disabled over their dream dramas that a group of surgeons and mechanics set up a great theater and offered a dream life to the general public. From time to time a dreamer was operated upon and brought back partially to waking life; but all such were so enthusiastic over the dream life and so eager to be returned to it that the desire was awakened among all peoples on the earth to experience its joys. All this required hundreds of years, but about a thousand years ago the

great movement got fully under way. Enormous dream palaces were built in every city and millions of applicants filled their offices and surgeons operated night and day. Since then . . . you have seen," and Eric was silent.

"But has no one ever foretold to you the inevitable result . . . the unavoidable death of the race?"

"Of course! Danforth! About two hundred years ago he led a movement with the avowed object of destroying the dream machines. He attracted quite a following among the scientist class, but was condemned by public vote and killed, together with most of his followers. A few escaped into the wilderness and were hunted down later."

"How typically human!" remarked Winters bitterly.

"It is time you slept, old man," said Antar. "Tomorrow you will be left mostly to yourself, for we all shall be busy. What would you like to do?"

"If there is a book of history covering the past five or ten thousand years I should like very much to see it."

"What is a book? Oh yes! I know. There are a few in the museums. We use sight and sound records instead. That door leads into the theater of this aparement —a small room but quite adequate. I will show you in the morning."

3

THE NEXT DAY Winters awoke very tired and with aching bones and was only too glad to be left quietly by himself. Eric led him into a small dark room and seated him in a comfortable chair. A series of numbered knobs set into a wall panel controlled the sight and sound records and Eric turned the knob which controlled the history records. A screen on the wall lit up and Winters gazed, fascinated, at a forest scene taken ten thousand years ago. He saw again the gayly colored foresters and viewed rapidly a complete record of the operations by which their physical needs were extracted from forest products.

And now he saw the dance of autumn festival about which he had been told so long ago. He heard the joyous singing of the maidens in their autumn colored costumes and his thoughts went back to that brief and unpleasant adventure. He turned the knob again and again to see new pictures and customs unroll before his eyes. Now he came to the days when the mechanical brain ruled supreme and later to the reconstruction period following its destruction. And then, like a shock of cold water, there appeared his own image and he heard him-

self addressing the council of black-robed educators! How could this be? A recording machine must have been present in the room without his knowledge! He saw again the countenances of his two friends in that age—five thousand years ago—and mused sadly upon the great gulf of years that separated him from them. So real and vivid was the picture—in full perspective and color—that he could hardly refrain from calling out to them.

By the end of that day Winters realized to the full how lifelike the dreams of the sleepers in the Palace must be. He wondered no more that they should give up the waking life for their mechanically-contrived Paradise. But he saw more clearly than ever how marked the trend was toward the extinction of human life and determined to speak to his young companions anew upon the subject. And that evening, as they all five sat around their meal, he did so.

"Eric, do you remember I spoke about the almost certain result of the dream machines? If I offend your morals and scruples, I am sorry, but I had rather die myself than see the human race so doomed and do nothing to save it. Are there in no part of the world savages or uncivilized men not likely to take up this custom of sacrificing life for a shadow?"

"The human race is one, Winters. It was civilized long ago."

"Then do you four have no regrets that the race should perish?"

THE YOUNG MEN looked at each other furtively.

"We may as well tell him," said Thorley.

"All right," said Eric. "For two days we four have been agreed upon the wisdom of your suggestion. We have determined to gather a group of colonists and escape into the wilderness to start life all over again."

"Oh thank God!" cried Winters, his eyes filled with tears. "When do you start? I shall go with you of course!"

"Easy, old man, easy! It is not so simple. The penalty for desertion is death! Yesterday Eric sounded out eight scientists whom he thought might feel as we do. Five of them agreed to come. Three refused, although they were sufficiently sympathetic as to keep the secret faithfully. Today all four of us have been similarly employed among our acquaintances. As a result we have seventeen recruits sworn to secrecy and we have approached no person whom we were not sufficiently sure of to at least preserve the secret."

"But . . . are there any women?"

Antar laughed boisterously. "Never fear, old man! There will be mothers in the new colony. We

have five women and twelve men, so far. Each of the new recruits, moreover, has agreed to approach his friends cautiously and we have hopes that the colony can be started within the week!"

"And how will you leave the city?"

"At night—and secretly. We will gather our equipment quietly and at midnight one night we will simply gather at the gate and set off. We will not be missed for half a day and by that time we can be safely hidden. Give us a week or so in the wilderness and we shall have erected defences so that we shall be safe forever."

"By the way, Winters: An attendant at the Palace saw you the other day and asked me today who you were. I said you were a visitor from Australia City and he suggested that you register for confirmation. I had to say that you had been ill and would come to the registry as soon as you recovered. So you will have to be confined to the apartment until we leave."

"A lot I mind! The history records have kept me happy all this day and are good for many another. Are there some pictures of the present world which I may be studying?"

"Of course! The knob marked 7 controls a detailed travelogue."

AND NOW FOR Winters began a three-day period of utmost interest. In the dark theater he explored each city on the face of the earth and ran amok through the centuries on the history records, taking notes, comparing, exclaiming excitedly over this and that discovery and development. In the evenings the five friends sat about their meal discussing the progress of the great conspiracy. That night there had been reported three new recruits and the following night twenty-two. By the fourth evening the total had reached seventy-two, counting the five of them.

"We have little prospect of gaining any others," said Eric. "Each recruit has approached every friend and acquaintance whom he can trust sufficiently not to betray the desertion. There are 430 adults in the city, not counting the dreamers, and of these we have about one-sixth. Our band counts thirty-one women and forty-one men. Most of us are under thirty years of age. We are ready to start at any time."

"By tomorrow I shall have my medical supplies," put in Antar. "I have to secrete a few things at a time to avoid discovery."

"I am ready now with our weapons," said Thorley. "I am taking nothing but ray tubes. Our seventy-two tubes will be more than a match for any stray citizens who may observe our departure—even supposing them armed, which is not at all likely—and once in the wilderness there is no handier or

more efficient weapon against wild beasts."

"I am taking nothing but two small atomic motors and some Maxtil-metal," said Starfax. "With this we can construct our own machines at leisure. I will be ready by tomorrow night, also."

"Then tomorrow we must warn the entire party," said Eric thoughtfully. "We shall meet at the gate at midnight exactly. Let each man speak to his own recruits — as quietly as may be possible."

There was a reflective silence. Antar's spectacled eyes were fixed upon Eric. "Have you told . . . er . . . how about Jalna, Eric?"

"I have said nothing yet. I am sure she will come, if I can only put it properly to her. I will do that tomorrow."

There was a further silence, broken by Eric.

"Do you not think, Thorley, that it might be well to take along one or two bombs?"

"No . . . I don't think so. In the first place we shan't need them and they are rather heavy. In the second place, they are dangerous things. If one exploded by accident we should have the whole city about our ears in no time."

THEY PARTED for the night full of anticipation for the morrow and Winters slept poorly. The next day he was left alone in early morning and tried to concentrate upon his history records, but found his thoughts constantly wandering. Every so often he rose and left the theater to pace restlessly up and down the apartment or stand peering out from the windows down at the silent streets. He had never found time to slow in passing. One final piece of work, however, had to be performed. From his pocket he drew a heavy book with pages of soft sheet gold. In this he transcribed with a sharp metal point brief notes of the past five thousand years of human history:

12000 A.D. — Discovery of the principle of transmutation by Maxtil. Work started to develop this discovery.

12500 — Maxtil's invention has revolutionized the world. No farming or manufacturing remains. Men congregate entirely in great cities.

12700 — Teeth becoming vestigial — many born without them.

13492 — Artificial sight for the blind invented.

13500 — Artificial dramas for the blind perfected.

13800 — First complete sense synthesis offered to the blind.

14000 — Great dream palaces built and largely patronized. This method of life grows steadily in popularity.

14800 — Danforth prophesies the doom of the race. He urges the

destruction of dream machines. He and his followers are killed.

15000—Date of Winters' awakening. Foundation of a new race of scientists.

And at the end of the last notation, Winters put a question mark and sat wondering what such a thing might mean from the point of view of human evolution. Here was the greatest and most drastic weeding-out of the unfit possible to imagine. From the entire world seventy-two young people were selected to found a new race. What would it be like? Certainly stupidity and insanity would be wiped out completely as human traits! After a hundred generations had evolved from such parents, what utopian dreams of perfection might not be achieved?

It was an excited and nervous group that gathered to an early meal that evening. Everything was ready. There waited only the appointed hour.

Eric ate little and presently rose. "Now I will approach our last recruit," he announced. "Wish me good fortune, for my future happiness depends entirely upon the outcome!"

And he opened the door and went out to the elevators and so to the street. The others sat silently and thoughtfully as he departed.

He walked purposefully through the lighted streets and entered an apartment building half a mile from his own. Jalna was waiting for him in a tower room with roof of clear domed glass through which the quiet stars gleamed frostily and seemed to provide the only light, although concealed bulbs suffused the walls with a subtle glow to eke out this meager illumination.

"Eric, dear! Have you changed your mind?"

"Changed my . . . how impossible! Say rather have you changed yours!"

The pretty mouth set in a wilful pout to which the determined little chin gave point and meaning.

"The marriage record of you is complete, Eric. Next week I shall be operated upon and set up housekeeping with you."

"With my shadow, you mean!"

"It is the same thing in the dream machines, as you very well know. But if you have not changed your mind why are you here?"

"To say farewell, Jalna . . . Oh, Jalna! Is my image so much more desirable than my true self?"

"YOU MUST stop, Eric! Why persist in this scene?" She was silent a moment, in evident emotion. "Those arms of yours I will feel about me as I sleep in the Palace just as firmly and just as warmly as I should now. You are a scientist and must know that! Oh Eric, you make it so terribly hard for me—why can't you be-

have like a normal man? What is there about such natural, ordinary things as the dream machines that you hate them so?"

"Natural! Ordinary! Death is natural, Jalna—yet I do not believe you love death! I am going away, never to return. Out in the wilderness I shall start life all over again, far from these cities full of ugly, breathing corpses. Jalna—come with me!"

"How horrible, Eric! You, a deserter! You will be killed!"

"I shall not. I am not going alone, Jalna. More than seventy other young men and women from our city are going with me. We shall found a new race in the wilderness and when, years from now, we return to this city and find the streets echoing emptily and the rotting corpses and bleached skeletons in the millions lying in the dream palace we shall wonder what perverse notion ever persuaded you all to perish from the face of the earth. We shall breed strong sons and daughters in our new city in the wilds—Jalna . . . my children will need a mother!"

"Oh Eric! What are you saying? You would desert the dreamers and the city? If everyone did that, the dreamers would die! Would you condemn a million fellow beings to death? Do you forget your oath of faith and trust which you swore when you began your education? Oh horrible, horrible!"

"Jalna, the time has come when something must be done. We youthful ones will do it. Our band represents all but three of the young people in this city. There will be left only old people and—dreamers. The old people will die and then what is left for the dreamers but to die as well? Whether you approve or not will not change our determination."

With a great groan the young man bent his head to his hands and after a moment rose to his feet and left the room abruptly. She listened until the sound of his footsteps had ceased and then dropped into a chair sobbing.

Presently she sat up and began to think things out. After a few minutes she nodded her head determinedly, making the dark curls about her ears bob with the motion, and left the apartment.

It was about eleven in the evening that a solemn-faced Eric returned to his four anxious friends. One glance at him was enough—no one asked as to the outcome of his evening's talk. Thorley strode over and placed a hand heavily upon his shoulder and Winters sat frowning mightily into space wondering what possible combination of prejudices could account for a young girl's preference.

"Come!" announced Antar. "Let us get ready." Without a word

each man donned clothes suitable to his new life—strong trousers and tunics of some dull brown synthetic material—and stuffed his pockets with the treasured items that were to be taken with him. In ten minutes all was ready and Thorley handed each man a ray tube.

"The others will receive theirs at the meeting place, in a street a few hundred feet from the gate. We must get there early and stand guard."

There were no dark streets to skulk through, and Winters was conscious of a vague distrust of these lighted avenues. He had a feeling that their very intentions would be written on their faces for any passerby to see. But there were no passersby. For two miles they traversed the silent blocks of buildings and came at last to a short lane lit by one concealed light set in the face of a building. At the end of it shone the white wall. In the next block he knew the gate waited them—and freedom. With pounding hearts they followed Thorley to a doorway and into a huge empty hall. He opened a door in one wall and revealed a closet piled full of material. Everything was as he had left it.

And now the conspirators took their places along the lane hidden in doorways and Winters kept vigil in the meeting hall itself. The minutes ticked by ever so slowly, but presently a group of three young women entered furtively and looked at him in distrust. He pointed to the closet and they opened the door and each equipped herself with a ray tube, with which they all seemed entirely familiar—for true equality of the sexes had long ago been achieved. They were dark and graceful—like civilized savages, Winters thought—and he sighed for the white-faced and golden-haired femininity of his own day.

4

THEN A GROUP of men arrived and the hall began to fill with young people, talking in low voices and glancing ever and anon at the door as each fresh arrival entered. Winters gazed in great interest at the gathering and reflected that except for Thorley, not one of them would have passed in polite society in his times; seen en masse they were more like Moroccans or Hindus. It was a few minutes before the appointed time when Thorley, Starfax, Antar and Eric entered and closed the door.

"We are all here—seventy-two of us," said Eric. "We may as well start!"

Starfax and Thorley stood in the closet and passed out equipment of all sorts, while Eric walked among the recruits making certain that they were equitably loaded.

Finally he held up his hand for attention.

"We will start now," he said quietly. "We must keep all together and make straight for the gate and through it without a pause. There will, of course, be no talking whatsoever, and you must all walk as silently as you can. Your ray tubes are to be held in readiness and you must make up your minds to kill relentlessly any person who observes our departure. It may sound brutal — remember that the whole future of the human race depends upon it. For that cause, a few deaths are a small sacrifice!"

And cautiously he opened the door and led the way out into the lane. Not a soul was in sight as they came into the curved avenue that paralleled the walls and turned down the street that led to the outer gate. Winters and his four friends walked in the lead and the others followed quietly — five and six abreast. At the gate itself was no light and noticing this at once, the procession halted undecidedly.

"It may have gone out from mechanical causes," whispered Starfax doubtfully, "but if so it would be the first time in years such a thing has happened."

"We must go on — whatever the reason!"

Cautiously they advanced, eyes straining to pierce the gloom at the gate. Not until they were within a hundred feet did anyone take alarm. Then suddenly great lights flooded the scene and from the houses on each side of the street poured a mob of men while a shout from the other end of the street apprised the deserters of the fact that they were hemmed in.

"Charge through them and away!" cried Thorley thunderously.

RAY TUBES were snapped on and a few men in the opposing ranks tumbled to the ground, but that was all. A thin hazy mist of red formed between the two parties now and Winters realized that the enemy was using rays as well and that the opposing forces were being dissipated where they met in space. He glanced over his shoulder and observed that the rear guard was similarly engaged with the attackers behind them. For several minutes the three forces stood there separated by the glowing veils of mist. It was an impasse.

Eric and Thorley discussed the problem quietly.

"Half an hour of this and our tubes will be exhausted," said Eric, "while they can obtain fresh supplies as they need them."

"There is only one thing we can do — charge through!"

"Fight with our hands?"

"What else? The ray tubes will counteract themselves and under

the cover of the force screen we can charge them and—perhaps—break through."

At a signal the party advanced towards the gate and broke into a run. With a shout they met the defenders and commenced striking and thrusting. Thorley's great bulk bore down all resistance and he got half a dozen yards in advance before he was stopped and only his bull strength enabled him to fight his way back to his companions. After five minutes of furious struggle they felt themselves being forced back.

Eric gave a command and they surged back leaving a space between the two parties once more and covering their front with a barrage of rays. The party at the other end of the street had remained in position and was evidently there for the sole purpose of preventing retreat.

But now a movement was observed among the defenders and a great machine was wheeled into the front ranks and three men busied themselves upon it.

"This is the end," said Thorley quietly. "That is the heat ray and at this distance it will wipe us out of existence in a second."

Eric stood with head hung despondently.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We have been betrayed and I'm afraid I know who was responsible!"

"You don't mean . . . "

"Yes, Jalna. Perhaps she thought she would force me after all to enter the sleep machines!"

Then Winters' attention was drawn by the opening of doors in the house beside them. "Look out!" he cried, clutching Eric's arm, and a half-dozen ray tubes swung guardingly in the direction he pointed. Out from the dark opening stepped—Jalna! Eric pressed forward involuntarily and stopped again in bewilderment, for in the girl's arms was a huge heavy, round thing and she walked toward them with difficulty. Thorley gave a great cry of relief.

"A bomb! Now we are saved—quick, Starfax, Bentall! Help me."

The three ran over and relieved Jalna of her burden and Jalna fell forward into Eric's arms. "I was there all the time . . . just in case . . . you were supposed to be captured and not killed but placed with me in the dream palace," Winters heard her sob. "But when they couldn't capture you alive and brought out the heat-ray I couldn't bear to think . . . "

But Eric stifled her broken words against his shoulder.

"Come, dear," he said. "We will all be killed yet if we are not quick!"

Thorley had set the bomb on its three-pointed stand and glanced over his shoulder at the compact little army to make sure they were

ready. "When it explodes we must charge through! It is our last chance!"

HE TOUCHED a small screw and a hiss of air could be heard an instant. Then the squat, ugly bomb hurtled into the air and down upon the massed defenders of the gate, while the entire force of deserters threw themselves quickly to the ground. There was a blinding flash and a roar that deprived Winters entirely of his hearing for five minutes. He saw bodies hurtle through the air and felt the pavement buckle and heave under him. An entire front of a building tottered forward and fell into the great hole that had been created, almost completely filling it in. Then everyone was scrambling to his feet and the party ran desperately forward, rays trained on the few remaining defenders.

Pounding feet behind them lent speed to the deserters and through the gate they swept, panting, and out into the blackness of the wilderness. After a minute Winters looked back and saw that the pursuit had stopped at the gate. They were free!

It was a weird sensation to walk along the great highway shining faintly blue with reflected starlight and to see the heavy shadows of the woods on either hand without being able to hear the slightest sound, but after a few minutes his ears commenced ringing and presently he was able to hear once more.

Eric led his party for more than a mile along the highway and then he struck into the woods along a faintly defined path which ended presently in a small clearing. A great dark shadow almost filled the clearing and Eric vanished inside it. Presently light shone out from a dozen windows and Winters perceived that it was an airship. The entire party trooped inside, joyous at the success of their undertaking, but sobered by the terrific cost in human lives which had been necessary to achieve it. The cabin was large enough to contain them, even if they were compelled to stand like sardines, and Starfax took the controls and the ship left the earth and set off over the top of the forest in a northerly direction.

"You did not tell me of this," said Winters to Thorley.

"No. We were not sure until this morning that we would be able to steal the airship and besides—the fewer in the secret the better chance of its being kept."

"Are we all here, or are any wounded?" called out Antar.

There was a general counting of heads. Sharp exclamations were heard throughout the crowded cabin and a woman's voice commenced to cry out "Steuben!

Steuben!" piercingly, but without answer. Seven of the original seventy-two were missing. They had evidently been killed or disabled when the bomb exploded, for none had been observed to fall during the fight. Steuben had been the husband of one of the party and the other women grouped around his widow and offered what comfort and sympathy they could.

And now began the voyage to their new abode. Starfax turned the ship westerly and Winters, peering over his shoulder, observed on a map that the destination was marked by a circle near the western end of Lake Superior. In an hour and half they commenced to descend and landed quietly in an open space surrounded by trees and shrubs. Everyone was glad to get out and stretch on the firm ground in comfort, for the weather was warm and the night a fine one. Winters fell instantly asleep.

When he awoke the sun was high in the sky and he gazed in amazement around upon a scene of furious activity. Starfax had his two atomic machines at work turning out steel girders and parts for a huge structure of some sort, the raw material for which was furnished by two dozen men shovelling earth and gravel into the hoppers.

BY NIGHTFALL that day the large atomic machine was completed and the night was spent as before in the open, although the airship would have provided shelter had it rained.

The next day Winters watched the mechanical science of the one hundred and fiftieth century at work full blast. One party busied itself about the two small machines, evidently turning out parts for a second large one. But the rest of the colony was engaged in constructing the walls of their new city. The machine stood perhaps twenty feet high and was square and solid. It moved on treads like a tank of ancient times and a belt of scoops tore up earth and stone from in front of it which came out at the rear in the form of metal boxes, which under the direction of Thorley were placed to form an ever heightening wall. By nightfall men were at work upon a roof of sheet metal. The entire structure enclosed the airship and perhaps two acres in total area. The next night saw it finished and a great sloping peak being erected on the roof "to ward off any posible bombs," Starfax explained.

The third day of their escape, however, Winters' recent exertions took their toll of him, and Antar, after a careful examination, announced that he would have to rest quietly for some days and that he would have to put him to sleep. Winters drained a cup of bitter

tasting medicine and sank into unconsciousness.

Winters' physical condition was more serious than he had suspected and so it happened that he missed entirely the construction of the fortified city in the wilderness. Antar had set to work to make a delicate atomic production machine, capable of those refinements of chemical content in the output, necessary to create synthetic medicine and while working upon this apparatus had kept Winters drugged under the principle that he who sleeps is his own doctor. It was a full week before he could produce the medicines he needed, and three days after careful injections Winters' eyes opened upon a transformed world.

WHERE THERE had been wilderness now stood a compact city some quarter of a mile in diameter. It was not beautiful, save insofar as sheer utility lends beauty, but it was a very marvel of good design. A protecting wall of some glass-like substance ran inside the layer of metal. The metal could be given an enormous electric charge sufficient to repel any approaching missile. The city was domed in a great peak of heavy glass calculated to avert any blow from bombs or shells. Great squat heat-ray machines were mounted in the wall to keep all attackers at a distance and Carfax and Thorley had together invented a sort of machine-gun throwing small bombs at high speeds.

The walls were not high—perhaps twelve feet—and all around them had been planted quick-growing trees which Antar had fertilized with artificial chemicals and already from a little distance, it was difficult to determine whether a city hid behind what appeared a patch of woods.

The city was laid out in concentric circles. First the buildings: then the avenues and a second circle of buildings; then another avenue and a second circle of buildings. The center was vacant and planted with shade trees for the present so as to make a pleasant little park.

"But how long did you say I had slept?" demanded Winters as his four young friends led him into this open space upon the day of his awakening.

"Ten days."

"Impossible! How could you have done this in such a short time?"

"Ha, ha! The actual building of the city took three days," replied Eric. "What took so long was the labor of constructing the necessary machines."

As they stood there a woman approached. It was Jalna. On her face was an expression the others had never seen there.

"Oh Eric! I am so happy here! You know, I used to fear the things which mere chance might bring to pass. Well, I find myself actually looking forward to something exciting happening now! Oh, how are you, Winters? I am glad you are up and around again."

And she placed her head against Eric's shoulder and placed his arm around her shoulder as so many wives had done before and would again, now that the race had laid a new foundation for its existence.

"After all your travels through the ages, you must be glad to settle down at last and live comfortably among friends!"

"I am not sure . . . It is a thrilling adventure, of course, and I am tremendously interested in the outcome of it. But is it not pretty certain, now that the city is built and fortified, that you will succeed?"

"Yes," replied Thorley, straightening his huge shoulders. "I think we can feel safe enough now."

"Then . . . I should like to go on and find out what becomes of your descendants . . . I cannot bear the thought of a dull and pleasant life here year after year . . . besides . . . "

"Besides what, you incorrigible one?" laughed Eric.

"I have not many years left to live. If I spend those years a month at a time through the centuries I shall see more . . . learn more. I have still to find out what goal lies at the end of the struggle."

"I see your point, Winters," said Thorley with a shudder, "but for myself I want no more sleep than the night brings. We have had enough of sleep, we people of this age!" And the others voiced their agreement.

"You cannot stand the physical strain for another week or two," put in Antar. "And when you do go into your long sleep, I will prepare drugs and stimulants for you."

"And I will build your lead chamber under the ground," offered Thorley.

"And I will undertake to construct an atomic motor that will last you five thousand years," said Starfax.

"You are all very good. What will you and Jalna do for me, Eric?"

Eric turned to his wife and smiled fondly.

"We will do what we can to render your last days here as pleasant as possible, old man," Jalna said softly. And of the four gifts Winters was not sure but that the last was the most valuable.

It was three weeks later that preparations were complete. The entrance to his chamber had been dug beneath the floor of a bedroom in Eric's apartment and none except the five knew its exact loca-

tion, for the labor had been done by atomic machines—busy little scoops that tore away the earth and turned it into lead for the lining and (at last) into air that left no trace of the detritus of excavation. So one evening after the meal, partaken of by the six friends together, Winters quietly rose and went to the door, looking up at the sky shining through the clear glass dome that shut in the city.

He was no astronomer, but he could sense a slight unfamiliarity in the constellations. Down on the horizon appeared stars he did not ever remember seeing in his youth thirteen thousand years before. And overhead were some slight changes, though he could not exactly place them. Ah! There was one! Sirius was no longer where he had been accustomed to find it. Doubtless there were others, and would be still more when he next gazed at the heavens. He sighed deeply and returned to the room to bid them all farewell. The five men shook hands solemnly, for he had taught them this ancient gesture of friendship, and Jalna cried a little.

Then with a tiny electric torch in his hand he descended the stone steps and shut the door and placed the heavy heavy alo-steel bar in its sockets. Even as he did so he could hear the atomic machine at work above, with its whirring roar and grunt, laying the metal slab and the flooring over the tunnel to shut him off from the world above—perhaps forever.

Announcement

Many of you have asked about subscriptions to *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*. These are now being accepted, and cost $2.50 for six issues in the U.S., Canada, and Pan American Union; foreign, $3.00. You may use the coupon on page 128 for subscribing; but if you'd rather not cut up your copy of FSF, the coupon is *not* obligatory! So long as your name and address are printed clearly, and it is clear just what you are ordering, a letter is entirely satisfactory. Be sure, however, to let us know the *number of the issue* you now have (this is number 5), so that you will not receive a duplicate copy; the practice is to start a subscription with the current issue, unless we know you already have it.

ECHO

by WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

He was an actor who truly lived his role.

THE REALLY GREAT parts are tragi-comic, because life is a tragi-comedy. They're scarce, though. The first ever offered to me to play was also the last: the role of Richard Gaunt.

The comic element here is that Gaunt's a real, living person, whereas I'm not real at all; I'm only an echo.

The tragic element is all Gaunt's. I said he's living. In one sense, that's true; in another, not. He's under sentence of death.

Yet aren't we all? Life is brief.

Mine is particularly so.

Actors are sentimental creatures. When the mushy mood is on, I think there's something tragic about poor little me, too.

Consider: I die tomorrow, and I'm only three months old.

Incidentally, the first book to catch my eye when I walked into Gaunt's library was Aubrey's *Brief Lives*—a literary classic, I learned later. I assumed it was about people who'd died young; actually, the title means brief, potted biographies.

It's said you can size up a man's character merely by glancing through his library. That was my motive at the time, although, in fact, I knew plenty about Gaunt's character. I was just checking. His books only confirmed my knowledge.

A cultured fellow, keen on the theater. A frustrated actor—that

was why he enjoyed his occasional flings at espionage.

The very same could be said of me. Or rather, of Narvel, of whom I'm an echo.

I have to refer to Narvel as though he were another person, for a good reason: he is.

Narvel's a good actor but not a lucky one, simply because no actor is lucky to be born a Venusian. He spends half his life chasing a part and the other half chasing an audience.

VENUSIANS ARE realists. Very matter-of-fact. They're first-rate scientists, mathematicians, architects, engineers . . . Poor playwrights and poor playgoers. They regard plays as childish make-believe and actors as infantile. Which maybe is true enough, on Earth as on Venus.

Terrestrials mature slowly and seldom entirely lose the youthful outlook. Venusians are born prosaic and knowing, with a few exceptions.

Narvel was an exception.

When he conversed with Richard Gaunt, he felt much more at home with the Earthman than with any of his fellow Venusians. Gaunt, though, felt anything but at home at that time. He was in a hotel millions of miles from home — only it had become a strange kind of hotel. All the windows and doors of his suite had sprung concealed locks on him for which he had not keys, and the uniformed janitor became a uniformed warden.

In short, the building had been a camouflaged prison waiting to snare him.

On the third day of pacing his carpeted cell, Gaunt said, "Okay, then, I admit it. I came to Venus for two purposes: one, genuinely to enjoy a holiday; two, to pick up what information I could about what goes on in there."

He jerked a thumb at the window which framed a view of Synthetics, the big new plant.

"Spying," said the hotel proprietor, who'd metamorphosized into the prison governor.

"Frankly, yes."

"Punishable by death."

"Only in time of war, friend."

The governor frowned. "It's always time of war, declared or not. Trade war. A war to the death."

"Only because you Venusians look at it that way. There's healthy, or there's murderous, competition. You carry earnestness to the point of fanaticism. Don't you ever relax and enjoy yourselves? Go to a show, or something?"

"If you mean the theater, Mr. Gaunt, no, I don't. Narvel here is more given to that kind of thing. Maybe you'll find it easier to explain this affair to him than to me. You'll have to explain it to some-

one, you know. I have orders to obtain a written, signed statement. I think it best if I leave Narvel to assist you to prepare it."

When the governor had gone, Gaunt smiled at Narvel.

"So you're to help me prepare my own death warrant?"

"I don't think it's quite so serious as that."

"It had better not be, Mr. Narvel. The Director of my firm is the President's brother-in-law, and I'm like a brother to the Director. So if I'm detained here beyond my holiday period, there will be what we term serious political repercussions. If I'm shot, then diplomatic relations will be broken off. Very bad for trade, you know."

"You won't be shot, Mr. Gaunt. All we want is a signed confession."

"I Was a Middle-aged Spy. Signed, R. Gaunt. That do?"

"I'm afraid not. Our officials are legally trained; they want every detail covered. I know the form, the phraseology, the way their elephantine minds work . . . We can compose it together."

Elephantine, thought Gaunt. Odd word for a saurian to use about saurians. But this fellow doesn't seem so cold-blooded as the rest of them. I might even get to like him.

HE DID. He got to know Narvel very well, but nothing like so well as Narvel got to know him. Narvel had a way of getting people to talk about themselves. He used their common interest in the theater as a lever to prise open Gaunt's mind. Once open, the mind poured forth. True confessions, ad lib.

Gaunt was only a part-time spy and not even suited to that; he hadn't the temperament and he talked too much. He was a poor amateur spy and a good amateur actor. He always needed an audience and he hadn't had one for weeks.

Because of his easy charm and entertainment value, he was the Director's favorite chief executive at Organic Materials Inc. There, all doors were open to him—except that of the Director's private safe.

He told Narvel a lot about his job, but nothing which could be of use to a rival organization such as, say, the new Venusian Synthetics set-up. He was garrulous but not imprudent.

At least, he thought he wasn't imprudent.

Actually, he was talking himself to death.

THE DIRECTOR of Organic Materials Inc. patted my shoulder. My new acquaintance with Terrestrial customs told me that either (a) he liked me, or (b) he wanted something from me.

He said, "It's good to see you back, Dick. Strike any paydirt?"

"Some. But their security's real tight, Lee. They were even watching me watching my step. Here's my report, anyhow."

I gave him the report which Synthetics had prepared. It was salted with information which looked like gold, but was valueless. By the time they found that the trails petered out, I hoped to have finished my part and petered out myself.

I'm what's known in the profession as a quick study. This role of Earthman was the quickest study I ever did. It had to be; Richard Gaunt was scheduled to return to Earth directly his vacation ended. Any extension wouldn't be easy to explain and might arouse suspicion.

I had picked up Richard Gaunt's mannerisms and speech easily enough. He'd described his friends and business associates, so I knew them fairly well, too, through him. Luckily, he was a bachelor. His nearest relatives were in Vermont, and he saw them only at Christmas—I shouldn't be around then.

Our own Intelligence filled me in with what I'd failed to garner about his office life and work.

Absorbing facts is one thing; absorbing experience is quite another. I'd had only the equivalent of an Earth-week's experience of handling a human body before I surrendered Gaunt's round trip ticket on the Terrestrial ship, *Pacific*.

The first trick had been to learn to balance. The gravities of Earth and Venus are near enough the same, of course, so there was no trouble from that direction. But I never realized before the extent to which we saurians adjust our balance with our tails. I spent much of the first day falling flat on my face—or rather, Gaunt's face.

But I was there behind Gaunt's face. So was he still, but moribund; above the thalamus his neuron paths were temporarily sealed off. Without stimuli, he slept, but whether he dreamed in his sleep I couldn't tell.

There was plenty of room for both of us. A large proportion of the sum of human brain cells is unused throughout an individual's life. From the saurian point of view, it seems an awful waste of brain matter. Anyhow, there I was, using some of Gaunt's spares.

There "I" was . . . This "I" should be defined.

It was discovered long ago that Ribo-nucleic acid carries the codes of memory. "I" was a memory pattern in molecules of RNA: the pattern of Narvel's memory, decoded, electronically copied, and planted in Gaunt's brain tissue.

Narvel walks and talks and

acts his head off to unresponsive audiences back there on Venus. Already I think of him as someone else, a kind of twin brother, maybe.

But me—I'm just an echo, destined to die like all echoes.

At least, that was the plan. There was a slow absorbent injected with me, which—imperceptibly at first, but with increasing effectiveness—would chemically nullify me. I should fade away without trace, coincidentally with the unwinding of Gaunt's transient mental paralysis.

Then, to the surprise of his colleagues, who'd noticed nothing untoward (I hoped) about his behavior, Gaunt would discover there'd been a short blank in his life. His doctor would diagnose it as aphasia, and either pass him on to a psychiatrist or, just as sensibly and uselessly, put him on a special diet.

No-one would know that during his spell of aphasia, Gaunt's hands had recorded every secret industrial formula to which they could obtain access at Organic Materials Inc; and passed them through certain channels to Synthetics.

I COULD HANDLE Gaunt's hands, so to speak, beautifully. Could forge his handwriting. These were consciously directed actions; but the unconscious actions of the body tended to throw me.

They, of course, were the automatic mechanisms buried in that still functioning thalamus. The thalamus had to be left functioning; it was the power-house. To shut it off also would deprive the body of all drive, indeed, of all life.

Venusian and Terrestrial bodies are vastly different. Although we shared the same kind of fishy ancestors, we Venusians had not wandered so far from the fish. But the Terrestrials had branched into mammals.

Being a mammal, without previous experience, was to me a series of surprises, mostly unpleasant.

Gaunt, I knew, had the social habit of drinking whiskey. I first drank whiskey on the Pacific with a couple of engineers from Minneapolis.

After a while, I remarked with some concern: "Darn, it, the grav-motors are failing."

This sometimes happened on space trips, and until they were repaired everyone had to endure free fall. I'd felt the beginning of free fall coming on; at least, I felt I was beginning to float. And I said so.

The two men looked at me strangely, then at each other.

"One whiskey on the rocks and he's floating," laughed one.

At once I divined the cause was the whiskey, not the motors.

So I laughed, and being the best actor (or reasonable facsimile of) on Venus, carried it off well—unobtrusively clinging to the edge of the bar counter to prevent myself from being carried off too.

I told them: "Actually, I've laid off the stuff for some time. Had to—got a stomach bug on Venus. Guess I'm still a little queasy from it. I'll stick to fruit juice."

I did, but it was a strain. Gaunt was no alcoholic, but he was a fairly heavy drinker. Once his bloodstream tasted whiskey again, it began crying out for it. I experimented privately in my cabin and found that just one shot had my mind floating confusedly detached from Gaunt's body. Two shots knocked me right out.

I had to leave whiskey alone, and put up with the withdrawal symptoms, which were hell.

I thanked my stars that Gaunt was a non-smoker.

So, when the Director, Lee Moss, got out the whiskey bottle in his office, I held up my hand and trotted out my excuse.

"Aw, hell, Dick, we've pulled off a real coup here. We've just got to have a little celebration. Have a beer, then. That won't hurt your belly."

I hoped he was right.

HE SPIKED A can and poured it. I sipped the stuff. It seemed weak and innocuous. I thought if I got it down quickly it might be okay. So I gulped it.

"My, you were thirsty," said Lee, regarding the empty glass. "Another?"

"No, thanks."

"Okay, General Booth. Now, tell me about life with the saurians."

I plunged into my well-rehearsed fictitious account of the adventures of Richard Gaunt, the gay amateur spy, all in the authentic, witty style of the man himself.

"Of course, they never realized that you can learn a lot from a bum steer if you *know* you're being handed a bum steer.

Then there was the gag about the neurotic computer-operator at Synthetics who used to take home copy sheets to check them in case the machine had made a mistake.

"He didn't trust that computer, but he trusted me. You know, that guy couldn't even trust his wife to . . . "

The gag was never finished, for at that moment Richard Gaunt's body went mad. It started to jerk violently. I couldn't stop it. The convulsions were terrible; they shook my thought processes to pieces. It was impossible to think straight, to control the body or my mind. I was utterly helpless.

"Help!" I cried, feebly.

Incredibly, Lee Moss laughed. I was still the funny man.

"You downed that beer too fast,

Dick. Try holding your breath for fifteen minutes."

I tried holding my breath for fifteen minutes, and nearly died after two; human lungs have small capacity.

I prefer not to dwell on the idiocies which followed. Lee had me trying to drink water from the wrong side of a glass, when I was still not all that hot at drinking from the right side. I drenched my shirt front. He thought that funny, too.

Then, killing himself laughing, he tried to "shock" me out of the fit. He shouted suddenly in my ear. He thumped me on the back unexpectedly. Flipped cold water on my neck.

Then he turned suddenly serious. He said, harshly; "This report is a fake."

That shocked me, all right; my convulsions ceased. I sat there, weak, exhausted, staring at him.

And he laughed again. "That's cured your hiccups, Dick. Say, that sure shows that psychological shocks are worse than physical ones."

Hiccups. I read them up later. Spasms of the stomach diaphragm — a joke to Terrestrials; naked fear to me. Fear comes to me whenever self-control is suddenly snatched away.

After that, I caught a cold and learned the misery of a similar scarey type of convulsion: the sneeze.

The rate of automobile accidents is extremely high on Earth. I don't wonder. If you're driving at a hundred miles an hour and convulsions like these hit you, your survival chances must be low. I can't make up my mind whether Earthmen are more foolish, or more brave, than Venusians.

I RECKON I put on the performance of Narvel's life, acting that breezy extrovert, Richard Gaunt, while timidly lurking in his vile body wondering what it was going to hit me with next.

I soon found out: glandular trouble. There was nothing wrong with Gaunt's glands; that was the trouble. Glands are a human's safety valves. Pressures build up and must have an outlet.

No saurian can imagine the stresses of Terrestrial sex-life; with us, eggs and their incubation are as mechanical a perfomance as eating. To a Venusian, both eating and procreation are necessary but time-wasting nuisances, interrupting the proper business of life — money-making.

Narvel kids himself that he's different, that he acts because of a need for self-expression. But he wouldn't act if nobody paid him to. I know.

Under my control (if that's the word) Gaunt's body had led a

celibate life. I knew this was out of character, but thought it wouldn't matter for my short term of existence.

I was proved wrong when, exerting Gaunt's charm, I persuaded Lee's private secretary to let me look inside his safe while he was out of the room. My excuse: he'd borrowed and not returned a confidential report of mine: he must have put it somewhere. Pure fiction. I wanted a chance to get the formula of Resinal within inches of my concealed microcamera for a second. This was one he'd kept even from me.

I was riffling through the files when the secretary—Kathy, twenty-five, chic, shapely—said, "Hurry up Dick, you'll get me shot for this."

She had a husky, provocative voice.

With the remark came a whiff of her heady perfume.

The combination of the two suddenly disturbed Gaunt's glands. His body slipped my control altogether. It spun around, clasped Kathy, and kissed her passionately.

She responded similarly.

I waited impatiently for this moment of mutual madness to pass. There was the Resinal formula within arm's reach, and all this idiot body could do with its arms was wrap them around Kathy.

Time was wasted. Lee was heard

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE HELL PLANET

by

Leslie F. Stone

●

THE INDIVIDUALISTS

The fourth story in the famous series—complete in its picture of a strange civilization

by

Laurence Manning

●

THE INVULNERABLE SCOURGE

A Different Story

by

John Scott Campbell

Insure your copy now—see Order Coupon on page 128

approaching. The safe was hastily shut. I never did get to see that Resinal formula.

That was the beginning of the end. All the urges in that truncated thalamus were stimulated now; they rose to flood level.

The fool body would turn around in the street and follow any blonde who looked anything like Kathy. It ignored my voice. It knew it wasn't its master's voice, nor even a voice at all.

Only an ehco. An empty echo.

IF THE CHOSEN women denied the body its desire, it attempted either to drown its frustration in whiskey or express it through physical violence.

I was riding a tiger—without even the option of dismounting.

Often I wished I could awaken my sleeping partner and ask for assistance: "Gaunt, how did you handle this crazy animal? Help me, I've lost the reins."

But Gaunt slept on.

I realized that he'd been conditioned all through his life to suppress or divert these dark urges. I didn't suppose it had been easy for him; but he'd been trained by his society; I hadn't. I was a tyro and the body sensed it.

It went on a rampage. It lurched from bar to bar, and got involved in brawls. It followed women into the more sordid recesses of the city, and was robbed and beaten up.

It showed up at the office, unkempt, dirty, cut, and bruised. Lee was worried; Kathy was disgusted. She repulsed its advances, and that was dangerous—very dangerous, indeed, for it had been meeting with constant rejection because of its disreputable appearance.

In a sudden fury of frustration, it seized her by the throat.

She screamed. Lee Moss came to her rescue. Gaunt's hands switched to his throat . . .

The struggling body was hauled off to a police cell. A police doctor pumped it full of sedatives. It relaxed, and lay still.

But not so still as Lee Moss's body, miles away in a mortuary.

Assisted by the drugs, I regained uncertain control of Gaunt's body, and was charged with the murder of Lee Moss.

I told the truth: "I don't know what came over me. I couldn't help myself."

That was considered to be no defense. There had to be a motive.

I had made previous advances to Miss Katharine Ferrant? Well, yes. I was an intimate friend of Lee Moss's? Frankly, no.

They didn't believe me. They chose a motive, and pinned it on me: jealousy.

This was one of the new special hurry-up trials instigated by this State. It was now considered inhuman to delay where a capital charge was concerned.

I was found guilty and sentenced. Unless there's a last-minute reprieve, I die tomorrow. And so complete my first and last role in tragi-comedy before a—as usual—small audience.

For me, now, it'll be a merciful release from an almost unendurable situation. I would have died, anyhow, around three weeks from now.

But for Richard Gaunt . . .

For Richard Gaunt I have written this story. For him I have betrayed my masters and, I suppose, my race—though I never felt truly one of that frigid race.

In the appendix to this will be found full confirmatory details regarding the Venusian Intelligence network and my dealings with it. They will clear Gaunt.

I request a stay of execution—say, a month—while this information is checked. Not to save my ebbing life, but Gaunt's.

Yet . . . I wonder. Richard Gaunt was a nice guy who, so far as I know, harmed no-one. In his dreams—if he dreams—he still is. Would he be grateful if he were awakened to find himself up to his neck in a mess like this? And then have to go on living in a body which murdered his friend?

He would be publicly exonerated, but—People identify a man's body with the man; they would fear a resurgence of that man-body's known dark tides.

No, he would not be grateful.

I must think some more about it. Maybe I shall destroy this document before dawn.

The Reckoning

Contention was very close this time; up to the last minute the first and second place stories were tied, as were the fourth and fifth place finalists. But except for a momentary three-way tie *(The Last Shrine made it)*, it was Manning and Munn all the way. Finals:

(1) *The City of Spider,* H. Warner Munn; (2) *Master of the Brain,* Laurence Manning; (3) *The Last Shrine,* Chester D. Cuthbert; (4) *Master of the Octopus,* Edward Olin Weeks; (5) *Do Not Fold or Mutilate,* William M. Danner; (5) *The Times We Had,* Edward D. Hoch.

PLANE PEOPLE

by WALLACE WEST

(author of *Dust*)

Caught up in a Jules Verne type of cosmic happening, they found themselves in a two-dimensional civilization.

I CAN'T understand it," said Doctor Adolph Strauss, nervously polishing the eyepiece of the five-inch telescope which he had set up in the garden behind his little drug store. "Yesterday I saw that comet. Yerkes and Flagstaff observatories corroborated my discovery. The New York papers gave the story half a column with my picture. Tonight the comet isn't in sight!"

"Poor dad," said his son Frank, who was lying on his back in the grass, staring up at the darkening sky. "I can see tomorrow's headlines: 'Amateur astronomer's comet a hoax.' 'Doctor Strauss's discovery discredited.' Ouch!"

"It's no laughing matter!" The rotund physician whirled upon his progeny. "If I've been mistaken, the president of the Amateur Astronomical Association will . . ."

"Yeah, I know." Frank rose lazily to his six feet two and yawned. "The A.A.A. will brand you for a publicity-seeking bungler. Well, guess it's time to relieve Marie at the soda fountain. I sure will be glad when this lousy vacation is over and I can start football practice."

Behind the counter was Marie,

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(illustration by Paul Orban)

a pretty girl despite her too-tight dress and ridiculous spike-heeled shoes. Soft golden hair and clear blue eyes set off a pert, tip-tilted nose.

"'Lo, Frank." She relinquished her post behind the faucets. "I'll be back for the eight o'clock rush. Don't work too hard."

Frank went into the back room to gossip with Bert Wheeler, the prescription clerk, a lean, pale youth who nourished ambitions of becoming a physician and marrying

A number of you who praised WALLACE WEST for his story, *Dust,* in our second issue, urged us to reprint the present tale; truly we needed no urging, for it is one which we enjoyed upon first reading, and enjoyed no less upon later re-readings. While this author's output has not been particularly large—he has always been a spare time writer, so far as science fiction and fantasy have been concerned—he has maintained the knack of writing a delightful, thought-stimulating story from the very first (which, in science fiction, was *The Last Man* in the February 1929 issue of *AMAZING STORIES).* His new material these days is mostly novels for Avalon Books, in many of which he ties together earlier short stories and novelets in a fascinating manner; the latest of these is *The Everlasting Exiles,* published this year.

Marie. The two were soon deep in a discussion of end runs and interference, when the front door slammed violently.

"Frank! Bert!" Marie called. "There's something enormous in the sky! Come out, quick!"

At the same moment Doctor Strauss, flushed and shaken, thrust his head in the back door.

"I was right, after all! The comet! It's right on us! Coming at terrific speed! And it's flat—like a pancake! That's why I couldn't see it." The head vanished.

"The governor's gone nutty this time sure," said Frank. "He's going to have a comet named after him if he has to manufacture the darned thing."

Outside, however, Frank's handsome face went white at the amazing spectacle. From horizon to zenith, the eastern sky was split by a brilliant white line. As he stared, this vanished, to reappear as an elongated oval. Then it thinned to a hair line once more.

"What is it, dad?" he asked.

"Don't know. It's like a pie plate, big as Earth. What we see is its wabbling edge. It's coming straight at us. The collision will split Earth like an apple." He turned back to the telescope.

"Oh, God," Frank heard the old man praying, "in this, my last moment . . . "

The words were drowned by a hiss similar to that heard when a whip is cracked. This grew to a million whips, then transcended sound altogether. The line of light flashed downward like the edge of a sword!

FRANK RECOVERED consciousness and sat up holding his aching head. His whole body shook, as though he held the terminals of an electric vibrator. For a moment he thought he was still in the garden. There was the tele-

scope, sprawling by its fallen tripod. Beside it, Doctor Strauss was lying, his open mouth and unconscious, staring eyes revealed in the moonlight. A little distance away, Marie had crumpled up, her silk dress in tatters. Near her Bert sprawled like a fallen scarecrow.

But there was something wrong! The fence surrounding the garden was in ruins, while of the houses which should have bordered the street outside there was not a trace. Turning, he looked toward the drug store, to find it converted into a heap of tangled lumber, as though it had been struck by a giant hammer.

And there was something wrong with the moonlight which revealed all this. It was of a peculiar greenish blue, which caused Frank to lift his eyes. With a bound that would have done him credit on the gridiron, he then came to his feet with a shout of pure panic. The green light was coming, not from any Moon he knew, but from a great globe which spun across the heavens like an airplane.

"Dad! Bert! Marie!" he yelled, his heart thumping with terror. "Wake up! There's something wrong with the Moon!"

Then the awful thought occurred to him that perhaps the others were dead. An icy hand seemed to close around his heart. It relaxed, however, when the doctor stirred, sat up, rubbed his eyes, stared at the strange sky, then scrambled toward his beloved telescope.

For a long moment there was dead silence while Frank rummaged through his pockets for cigarettes and found none. Finally his father turned to him with a face suddenly drawn and wan.

"That's not the Moon, Frank. That's the Earth!"

"What's it mean, dad?"

Frank had unearthed a single crumpled cigarette from an inside pocket and was lighting it with trembling fingers.

"It means that we've been carried off on Strauss's comet." The little man could not resist giving their strange habitation his own name. "It probably impinged only slightly on Earth, scooping us off as you would take a cherry off the top of a sundae with a spoon."

FRANK STARTED to walk across to the two other forms, only to discover that his progress was slow and clumsy, as though he were climbing a steep hill. Yet the ground was perfectly flat—flatter than he had imagined ground could be—and covered so far as the eye could reach with a dense, lichenous vegetation into which his feet sank as into a Persian rug.

Bert's thin frame and sallow face looked even more ineffectual than usual under the green Earthlight. Frank leaned over and shook him half contemptuously. Poor

devil, what a shock he'd get! As the pharmacist moaned and showed signs of recovering, Frank turned his attention to Marie.

Without the mask of pertness behind which she always had hidden, the girl was much more charming than he had ever seen her. Her red lips were parted, showing fine white teeth. One rounded shoulder gleamed provocatively through her torn dress. Even in the relaxation of unconsciousness her figure showed long, graceful lines.

"Oh, how funny and green you look!" Marie had opened her eyes and was struggling to sit up, realizing her half-naked condition. "What hit us? I feel as if I'd been through a washing machine. Got a cigarette? I need one badly."

"Only this one. Have a whiff. It probably will be your last." He regretfully relinquished the butt. "We're off on a comet, a la Jules Verne. The governor wasn't so crazy, after all. Can you stand up?"

"Oh, yes." She seemed unable to grasp the astounding news as yet. "Hello, Bert. You look as though you'd been dragged by a horse."

But Bert was far beyond caring how he looked. He alone seemed aware of the hopelessness of their position. His lips were blue. His eyes rolled wildly.

"What have I done?" he moaned. "What have I done? I'm going to die, and I don't want to." He began to laugh hysterically until Frank shook him back into sanity.

"Who says we're gong to die? Buck up, old man. Let's go talk to the governor. Come on, Marie."

Frank held out his hand and thrilled to the firm, cool touch of hers as he assisted her to rise.

THEIR RETURN to the doctor was another surprise. Although it looked level, the ground now seemed to slant sharply. They were forced to fight against the tendency to break into a run and only stopped beside the doctor by digging their heels into the turf.

"Say, what is this?" demanded Frank, sitting down because it seemed easier than standing against that invisible pull.

"I don't know, boy." Then, a speculative light in his nearsighted blue eyes, his father added: "When I was at the fairs they had a big wheel which spun round and round. You got on the wheel, and if you stayed near the center you could hold on. But if you slipped to the edge, off you went. Well, this comet is very thin and perfectly flat, like a phonograph record. It's whirling at a terrific rate, as you can see by the spiral motion of Earth up there. Centrifugal force accounts for its being easy to walk in one direction and hard in another."

"Which is all perfectly lovely," countered Marie, "but what I want

to know is, how and when do we eat?"

"All you think of is eating," Bert interrupted. "Now you've made me hungry."

"This grass has berries on it," said Frank. He picked a handful of a waxen fruit. "Hm-m-m! Don't taste bad."

"They may poison us," Marie suggested.

"Now, see here." Bert looked as if he were going to be ill. "That's no way to talk. Kidding's all right at the store—but this is serious!"

"Scaredy cat," Marie sniffed as she watched Frank still eating, and followed his example.

The pharmic glared at her and muttered under his breath. His dormant jealousy was awakening rapidly.

"What do we do next?" asked Frank after a long silence.

"I don't know," confessed the doctor, his head in his hands. "It's outside my experience. And it's going to rain soon, too," he added, staring at a low bank of mist or cloud which was sweeping over the ground toward them from what they considered the axis or "up" side of the country. "We ought to find shelter, I suppose."

"Let's start walking 'up' then. Better bring the telescope along. You can carry the tripod and Bert can bring the tube."

"Hey, how about you carrying something?" Bert protested. "And who gave you the right to issue orders, anyway?"

"Well, somebody had to take charge."

"How about consulting me—us—first? We ought to draw lots. That's the way they do in desert-island stories."

"Sometimes they fight it out for the leadership. Want to do that?" Frank's voice was cold.

"Aw, say, now, I'm no fighter."

"All right, then." Frank slipped one hand under Marie's arm and lifted her to her feet. The pharmic choked with rage, but made no further protest.

"But wouldn't it be much easier to walk 'down'?" objected the girl after a few minute's laborious trudging against the centrifugal pull and the wind.

"Sure," replied Frank. "But, if dad's theory is correct, the farther 'down' we go, the easier the going will get until we'll be running and can't stop and are swept right off the edge of the planet like a spark from an emery wheel. No. We'd better go 'up'. The pull should become less as we advance."

The clouds were pouring toward them in a tumbled mass, and after half an hour's travel the rain commenced. But it was like no rain they knew. Instead, it resembled a barrage of machine-gun bullets flying almost parallel to the ground, and was accompanied by a gale

which stopped their progress like an outthrust hand.

Marie whimpered but struggled valiantly on, her tiny spike heels sinking into the tundra, her permanent wave only a memory. Frank looked at her with a new respect and growing admiration and tried to aid her as best he could.

Bert was the first to quit the unequal struggle. Dropping the telescope, he lay on his face behind that slight shelter and cursed savagely.

Since no rock or hill offered shelter on the mist-enshrouded plain, Frank also stopped, directed his father to sit with his back to the rain, slumped down beside him, and pushed Marie into the shelter formed by their bodies. On Earth the girl would have been unprotected from the rain, but here, because of its almost horizontal path, she was fairly dry. The back of her protectors ached with the smart of the lashing drops, while little rivulets flowed from behind them and trickled down on the drug clerk.

"How long do you think we can hold out?" Frank whispered to his father as soon as he saw that Marie, completely exhausted, had fallen asleep.

"Two or three days, unless we can find shelter or light a fire."

"Say, dad"—the youth found his parent's wrinkled hand and squeezed it gently—"I've treated you pretty badly at times, and I'm sorry. You're a good scout."

"Let's forget it, then." The old man's voice quavered. "I was too old when you were born to understand you, I'm afraid.

HOURS LATER, as green Earth was plunging over the edge of the planet, the Sun rose over the other rim and started a rapid spiral toward the zenith. Miraculously the rain stopped, the crawling clouds evaporated, and the wind died away.

Dripping and exhausted, the four started forlornly about them over the unbroken plain. Marie had awakened with a violent chill, while the doctor had developed a hacking cough.

"We've got to have a fire," announced Frank. "Who's got a match? Mine are all gone."

The doctor produced a few sticks from which the heads had melted.

Bert rummaged through his pockets, but fared no better.

Frank looked inquiringly at Marie.

"Where do you think I'd carry a match in this rig?" she laughed, hugging her knees and trying to still her chattering teeth. "I'm as naked as the girls on the lipstick calendars," she added, to show that she had not lost courage.

"How about the telescope lens

as a sunglass, then? This moss is drying out rapidly."

Chagrined that he had not thought of this before, the doctor unscrewed the glass. Only a few minutes were required to create a tiny blaze, around which they dried themselves and regained some of their spirits.

"All right; let's go." Frank realized that to sit still meant death in this barren land. Marie clung to his arm, laughed at all his jokes, and did not try to hide the look of adoration in her eyes.

Although only two hours had passed, the Sun had reached the zenith, and the heat had grown oppressive when they came across a path in the tundra which made the going somewhat easier. This track was narrow, but it ran in the direction they were taking and proved a godsend for Marie, whose pretty shoes had become mere pulpy masses.

"At least, there is some sort of animal life in this strange world," the doctor said. "Maybe we won't starve, after all."

Hardly had he spoken when Frank motioned him to be quiet.

"Food in sight. Some kind of creature up ahead."

DEPLOYING to right and left, they crept forward. Soon a bright-green object could be plainly seen coming down the path. Frank gripped the tripod, their only weapon, and crouched, hoping the peculiar thing would not see him. The more they advanced, the more extraordinary their prey appeared. Seen close at hand, it resembled a gigantic sole or flounder, being flat as a pancake and evidently propelling itself by extending and retracting its under side. In the head portion were two narrow eyes and a wide mouth which worked continuously. The thing plainly was endeavoring to escape from some pursuit, and took no notice of its new peril. It was on the point of scrambling past the humans when Frank swung his tripod. It took two blows to dispatch the creature, and between the first and second it set up a shocking squeal which set their teeth on edge. It was almost human.

"Get out the glass, dad. We'll have dinner right now." Frank held up the "catch," which looked exactly like a dusty fish.

Their preparations were interrupted, however, by a peculiar, high-pitched humming which increased rapidly from the direction which they had agreed to call "up the hill."

"More of them," reported Frank, shading his eyes from the Sun. "Might as well lay up a supply for the winter."

But the creatures which now came scooting down the path were of an arrestingly different nature from the fish they had just killed.

Bert took one look at them and beat a hasty retreat. Even Frank paled as he motioned Marie and his father to stand behind him and poised the tripod for action.

The newcomers were about six feet long and two broad, and were equipped with innumerable arms or legs which extended from their spiny sides like those of centipedes. But the most amazing thing about the creatures was that, for all their length and width, they could not have been more than an inch or two thick. In fact, they looked like dreadful animated ribbons on the dusty path as they shot along at race-horse speed.

It was their heads, however, which bothered Frank most. Somehow, they looked weirdly human, as though the skull of a man had been run intact through a clothes wringer. The flattened eyes were there, the protruding nose and square chin, coasting only a fraction of an inch above the ground. And the creatures were spaced evenly along the track, as though in some intelligent formation.

"They give me the jitters," whispered Marie, who stood her ground, determined to shame Bert for his cowardly retreat. "That first one looks like Lee Wong, the laundryman."

"Shut up!" Frank realized their grave danger only too well. "They may hear us. Don't move. They're watching the path and may not see us."

FOR A FEW seconds it did look as though they would escape, for the flat things paid no attention to them but swept down the path without hesitation until they came to the pool of blood where Frank had killed the "fish."

Here they stopped — there were five of them in all — and held what looked to be a hurried conference. They seemed to use long antennae which sprouted from their faces like mustaches as some sort of a means of communication.

Coming out of their huddle, they began to explore the sides of the path while the humans held their breath in agonized stillness. One of the things at last came upon Bert's footprints and scuttled along them in pursuit.

The pharmic, who had stopped after running several hundred yards, saw his pursuer coming and let out a yell of terror as he began another sprint. He had not gone a hundred yards when he was overtaken. Frank saw him lift one foot to trample the hideous head into the ground. The next instant he screamed in agony as a sheet of red light shot along the ground toward him. An instant later he plunged sidewards into the moss.

"Frank! Help! They've done something to my feet! Come kill

(illustration by Paul Orban)

the damned thing! Ow! They're murdering me!" he wailed like a small child.

But Frank was unable to help. The remaining flat things at last had discovered him and his companions and surrounded them, as though waiting for a hostile move.

Tentatively Frank thrust the end of the tripod at one of them. A flash of flame brust from some instrument held in the forward claw of the one Marie had called "Lee Wong." The end of the tripod fused and melted away.

Frank's flesh crawled at the thought of the tortures which probably lay before them at the hands of these monstrous beings. The thought flashed through his mind

that perhaps it would be wisest to slay Marie and the doctor with the tripod before they could be captured. Then his natural optimism revived, and he determined to meet the situation with a smile, no matter what the future might hold.

"Phew," he groaned, trying to be comic despite his dry throat. "Now what's to do? Mustn't monkey with these babies. They're poison. All right, old boy, "he added bowing to the one who appeared to be the leader. "What's next on your snaky highness's program?"

For answer the flame, much diminished in power, swung until it struck his right foot. Instantly the leather of his shoe became painfully hot. Frank lifted the foot and stood dubiously on one leg, like a crane. The beam did not travel upward, as he had expected, but shifted to the other foot. Perforce he stood on the right leg and lifted the left.

"Reminds me of those old stories about how Western gunmen made their victims dance by shooting at their feet. Maybe that's what he wants." He executed a few steps, which disconcerted the enemy as much as if he had vanished into thin air. He and his companions went into another huddle, feelers touching, exactly like a group of football players confronted by some unexpected strategy by the opposing team.

In his dance, Frank had moved several yards up the path. When the leader of the flat people returned to the attack, the ray was much diminished in power. Tentatively, the youth made a step down the road. The power of the ray increased agonizingly. He retreated, and it faded once more.

"Looks as if they were inviting you to pay them a visit," Marie suggested through white lips. She and the doctor had not yet been discovered, although they stood in plain sight only a few feet off the path.

A renewed bellowing from Bert made them glance in his direction. The clerk had arisen and was hobbling frantically toward them, prodded by a shaft of light.

"Come on, then!" Frank could not help laughing at the ridiculousness of their dilemma, although he was casting desperately about in his mind for some means of escape. "Might as we humor them. They'll kill us without a qualm if we don't. Hey, dad, come out of it. This is no time to be day-dreaming."

SO, HERDED like cattle, with the mysterious ray ready to inflict painful punishment each time they deviated form the path, the four dispirited humans plodded up the lane, all of them, with the exception of Bert, trying to pretend that the experience was only a

lark. Frank's heart swelled with pride at Marie's grit, and his hand sought hers.

For a long while the doctor seemed sunk in thought, as though he were trying to solve a difficult problem. Hands behind his back, he hurried along. Then he cleared his throat and touched Frank's arm.

"I once had a mathematics professor who held that life was possible in two dimensions as well as three."

"Meaning what?"

"Why, I'm just wondering. These devils seemed startled out of their wits every time you jumped into the air. And notice their eyes! They move from side to side, but never up and down. Frankly"—he leaned closer and whispered the words as though afraid of being overheard—"I doubt if they know the meaning of up and down at all. And if that's so . . . "

During the last few hours, Frank had stopped regarding his father's queer theories with condescension. The young man was growing up rapidly, and his smart-Alec attitude was being succeeded by thoughtful consideration.

"Do you think that gives us a chance to escape? Perhaps, if I . . . "

"Don't do anything rash, boy. They don't seem really hostile, and I'm confident they're highly intelligent. Probably they're taking us to their headquarters. Since we would be dead of exposure in a week's time, we'd better go along without making any disturbance. I only wish there was some way of communicating with them!" His scientific enthusiasm had superseded fear.

"They talk with their feelers. That lets us out."

"I'm not so sure of that. Let's wait and see."

Marie had been stumbling along on bare feet, around which she had wrapped strips from her tattered dress. At this point in the conversation, she stepped on a sharp stone and would have fallen had not Frank picked her up in his arms.

This action set their captors in a furor. They deployed right and left in search of the girl, and it was several minutes before they gave up the search and returned to prod the other captives onward. When Frank set the girl on her feet, a quarter of an hour later, the creatures again were thrown into a near panic and went into their customary huddle to discuss the matter.

If we could climb a tree, they'd lose us completely," predicted the doctor. "As soon as we leave the ground, we cease to exist for them."

But there were no trees—only the endless plain.

THE SUN HAD spiraled across the sky twice, and Earth

and Moon, now diminished to pygmy dimensions by the onward flight of the comet, had followed it thrice, when they caught sight of a curious formation on the ground half a mile ahead.

Unquestionably it was a city, but a city such as they had never dreamed of. Along broad, radiating avenues were multitudes of what appeared to be open-topped, five-sided boxes. In and out of these, it could be seen as they approached, were moving thousands of the thin people, engaged in the pursuit of business and pleasure. The sides of these houses were only three or four inches high and painted in brilliant, contrasting colors. It was to be observed, also, that the edges of the inhabitants were of the same color as their houses. That is, a family of five or six red "thinsies", as Marie had now dubbed them, would inhabit a house of the same color, while near at hand a green house would be full of grass-tinted monstrosities.

"They paint their visible portions to aid in rocognition," the doctor suggested. "You will notice that the tops of their bodies are a uniform dull white."

"They won't have to paint us." Marie still tried to maintain her flip attitude, although it was wearing rather thin in spots and allowing a very frightened little girl to peep through. "We'll join the red tribe. We're sunburned like tomatoes."

The arrival of the humans created a sensation in the town. Great crowds of the creatures gathered along the sides of the streets to watch their progress, and the shrill humming which seemed an attribute of all of them rose until it all but deafened the newcomers.

But, unlike human crowds, this one remained orderly and let Frank and his companions pass through a narrow lane in the midst of the thoroughfare.

Bert was in an ecstasy of terror as the thousands of long feelers brushed his feet. More than once Frank had to steady him as he stumbled and would have stepped into the midst of the throng.

"Easy, old man," he warned the pharmic, whose eyes flitted about continually, seeking some way of escape. "They've got our number. Buck up. We'll come out all right."

"I'll never get out of here alive." Bert's teeth were chattering. "If they'd only look up at us, maybe we'd have a chance. Ow! Take that devil off!" An impatient guard, annoyed at his hesitancy, had prodded his heel with the ray.

"Shut up, Bert," snapped Marie, whose nerves were stretched tight. "Why don't you act like a man? Frank's not afraid."

"Haven't time for that." Frank gripped Wheeler's trembling arm

and yanked him forward as he saw signs of a disastrous panic. "Let's get out of here before we step on a few heads and get burned to death."

STRAIGHT THROUGH the city, which, except for its brilliant and barbaric coloring, presented a strangely depressing appearance, they were herded toward an immense polygonal structure in the mathematical center of the converging streets.

Here a conclave already was gathering to receive them. They perceived long lines of the thin creatures, most of them painted a brilliant yellow, pouring through the many doors and ranging themselves in well-spaced order inside.

"Might as well put on a show to impress them with our supernatural powers," said the doctor as they approached the walls of this building. "Remember that we present a totally different aspect to them when we sit down, lie down, place our hands on the ground, and so on. If we make enough changes, perhaps they'll decide that we are Old Men of the Sea and treat us with respect."

Suiting the action to the word, he stepped over the pygmy wall, and, followed by his companions, threaded his way between the rows of thunderstruck spectators until he reached a wide cleared space in the center of the building.

Their guards dashed wildly around the outside of the hall, as completely at a loss as an Earthly policeman would have been if his prisoner had walked through a brick wall.

Meanwhile, in the center of the auditorium, the humans were performing strange antics. In unison they kneeled down, rolled over, danced, stood on one leg, and performed similar feats, while a swelling hum of astonishment from the spectators told them that their efforts were creating a sensation.

When the assemblage was humming and hissing like a collection of dynamos, a squad of red-painted guards at last pushed their way to the center of the floor and leveled their weapons at the Earthmen. Instantly the latter stood still. Apparently this was considered a sign of surrender. At any rate, the commotion diminished and the jammed exits were cleared.

At last, when perfect silence had been restored, a vermilion personage, surrounded by a heavy guard, hesitantly approached the captives. Tentatively it thrust out its two-foot-long feelers toward Bert. The boy kicked out and stumbled back in dismay. For a moment it looked as though the personage intended to order his guards to destroy them. Frank's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and a cold sweat broke out on the palms of his hands.

Then the yellow leader turned its attention to Doctor Strauss, who had advanced and stood unflinchingly in front of the others. It must be understood that the doctor's thin shoes long ago had disintegrated until now his toes stuck through the leather and stared back at the thinsie which inspected them. After some hesitation, the creature rested its feelers upon the exposed digits.

A look of amazement was born and grew on the doctor's round face.

"It's talking to me!" he exclaimed. "Some sort of thought transference which only becomes operative through physical contact. He's apologizing for the rudeness with which we were welcomed!"

A BURST OF hyterical laughter interrupted his explanation. Marie's control at last had snapped.

"Oh, the doctor's talking with his toes! Shake toes with the rulers of Thinland, doctor. They're just plane people. This is worse than 'Alice in Wonderland.' " Tears trickled from her eyes, and she at last was forced to sit down on the floor, where she rocked back and forth, to the vast astonishment of the concourse.

"This is no time for nonsense, Marie!" Strauss warned her sternly.

"Look! Look!" she choked." "That red fellow has placed his feelers on thinsie's tail, and the next guard has connected with him. See, all the creatures are in contact. They're listening in on your conversation, doctor. Don't tell any state secrets. Oh, Frank, make me stop laughing! I—I can't." She was crying now with dry, jerking sobs.

Realizing that she was going into a real fit of hysterics, Frank lifted the girl to her feet, shook her, gently at first and then more vigorously, until her teeth rattled and her sobs ceased.

When they glanced back at Strauss they observed that the old man's face was at once blank and tense, as though he were trying to talk for the first time with a mechanical larynx.

"Here, take hold of my hand, Frank. You, too, Bert and Marie," he commanded. "I want you to hear what's going on and maybe help me out in the pinches. This is all new. These people think so differently from us that even their thought waves sometimes mean nothing to me."

He extended his hand as he spoke. Frank grasped it, and gasped as a shock ran up his arm and through his whole being. Instantly he was in tune with the strangest conversation of his life.

"Most illustrious sir"—the words formed distinctly in Frank's brain, like smoke rising through

wet leaves—"you will excuse my forwardness in touching you, but this arises not from an ignorance of the usages of polite society, but from your apparent inability to understand the spoken word. Your lordship is so peculiar in appearance—five ovals connected to a much larger oval—that before we enter into further communications, may I beg you to satisfy the curiosity of one who desires deeply to know whence his visitor came and how he is able to change his shape at will?"

"I come from space, sir." The doctor's words came distinctly to his son, although the little astronomer's lips had not moved.

"Pardon me, my lord, but is not your lordship now in space as he converses with me, `King Toko of Umenia, even at this moment?"

"Would your majesty be kind enough to define space?"

"My lord, space is length and breadth prolonged to infinity. Everyone knows that."

"You are wrong, sir," Strauss answered. "You imagine space as having two dimensions only. I come from a land of three dimensions—height, breadth, and length."

The king was quiet for a long moment as though trying to digest this amazing information.

"Would your lordship condescend to explain in what position is his third dimension, height?"

"It is up above and down below."

"My lord means that it is toward and away from the center of Umenia?"

"Not in the least. I mean a direction in which you cannot look because your eyes are not made to look other than to the left and right. In order to perceive space you should have an eye on your upper side; that is, on what you would your inside."

"An eye on my inside! You jest."

"Not so," replied the doctor, adopting the stately manner of the king's utterances. "I tell you I come from the land of three dimensions. I can look down upon the plane of Umenia and discern the inside of all you call solid. I can see that fifty guards are now patrolling the outside of this building. I can discern the contents of yonder strong box in which are stored many documents. Permit me to bring one of them to you."

A BUZZ OF terrified astonishment greeted this announcement. This was intensified to a shrill scream from the thousand onlookers as the doctor marched to the great box in the center of the amphitheater, lifted an inscribed tablet through its open top, and a moment later placed it before the king.

"Truly, you are a magician!" muttered the monarch.

"Not at all." The doctor now began to show his usual impatience. "You locked the box, but that did not prevent my reaching through its top—that which you call its inside—and bringing proof of my powers. This is due to the fact that you live upon a plane. What you style Umenia is a vast level surface upon which you and your countrymen move about without rising above it or falling below. My shape is not that of five ovals connected to a larger oval. That is only the edge of what I call my foot. In fact, I am not a plane figure but a solid, made up of an infinite number of circles, squares, and other geometric figures placed on top of one another. I am a creature called man. My name is Adolph Strauss."

"You talk in riddles, Adolph-strauss."

"Behold another proof, then," commanded the doctor. "I will lift my foot slowly. Order your guardsmen to hold it."

The king did so. Instantly six red thinsies leaped forward.

"We have him," they shouted. "No! Yes, we have him still! He's going! He's gone!" Their thin arms waved back and forth impotently as the doctor stood on one leg and winked at his fascinated son. Then, perceiving the other foot, they flung thenselves upon it and shouted their victory as the king crawled up to make inspection.

"But this is not the same person!" said the baffled monarch. "Or, rather, it is af if he had turned himself inside out. See, the largest of the five small ovals is on the right side instead of the left."

"That is my other foot," the doctor explained. "I lifted the first foot into the third dimension. Now are you convinced?"

POOR KING TOKO was at his wit's end. He broke contact and conferred hastily with his sages. One of these, a decrepit creature with mathematical leanings, asked to take up the questioning.

"Tell me, Mr. Mathematician," resumed the doctor when the thought current had been restored, "if a point moves toward the center of Umenia, leaving a luminous wake, what name would you give to the wake that it would leave?"

"A straight line, of course," was the haughty reply.

"And if the straight line moved sidewise, parallel to itself, what name would you give the figure thereby formed?"

"A square."

"Now stretch your imagination a bit and conceive a square moving parallel to itself upward."

"What! Toward the planet's center?"

"No, no! Upward, out of Umenia altogether. I mean that

every point in your—that is to say, in what you call your inside—is to pass upward through space in such a way that no point shall pass through the position previously occupied by any other point, but each point shall describe a straight line of its own."

"And what may be the nature of the figure which I am to shape?" the mathematician floundered.

"You will generate a solid, which will be bounded by six sides—that is to say, six of your insides. You see it all now, eh?"

But at that point the mathematician went violently insane and had to be removed screaming from the hall.

The king, it developed, was no quitter. He once more took his place by the doctor's side and begged further enlightenment.

"Be thou juggler, enchanter, dream or devil, I will make yet another effort to comprehend the meaning of your lordship's words," he said. "Yet I must confess that I cannot grasp your reasoning."

"Why don't you lift him off the ground, dad?" Frank queried. "That should convince the damned idiot."

King Toko caught the meaning of this remark, although, luckily, not its disparaging tone, and shuddered throughout the yellow length of him.

"Lift me out of space?" he cried.

"No, never. My people would not permit you to lay hands on my royal person."

"How about one of your councillors, then?" suggested Frank.

The king thought deeply for several minutes. Finally he replied:

"Very well. Lift Puro, my secretary of state. He is old and feeble, and if he dies there will be no great loss."

But the sage in question had no intention of being made the subject of any experiment. Wildly he scuttled toward an exit and was only captured as he was leaving the building.

Brought back, he hummed and shivered in a very nightmare of terror until a sharp command from the king silenced him. Then, like a lamb to the slaughter, he crept forward to his doom.

Overcoming his distaste for the creature, Frank gripped the ribbon-like sides and hoisted mightily. Puro was surprisingly light for his size and came away from the ground like a feather. For a moment his slit eyes closed and Frank feared that he had died of fright. Then his eyes slitted open and his excited buzzing threw the whole auditorium into another uproar.

"Either this is madness or it is hell!" Frank caught the thought vibrations as the poor fellow squeezed his eyes shut once more.

"It is neither," said the doctor. "It is knowledge; it is three dimensions. Open your eyes again and tell what you see."

Slowly Puro complied. The hall was hushed as he began to speak.

"It is a new world!" he chattered. "I see the inside of this creature which has lifted me, yet I can see no heart, nor lungs, nor arteries, only a beautiful, harmonious something. I see a space that is not space. I see what I had considered my own inside, and yet it is not my inside. I see both the inside and outside of this amphitheater, even as the stranger has described it. I see the inside of the strong box. I see the interiors of houses in the city. Behold, I have become a god, I, Puro, whose death, O king you just said was of little importance!"

"Set him down. He grows blasphemous," commanded Toko. "I believe! Strangers, you shall have the freedom of the city and shall teach me and my people the secrets of the thing you call space. A holiday shall be declared in your honor, and you shall want for nothing so long as you remain with us."

Frank did as he was bid, and old Puro, dazed by his experience, crept away to cogitate in one corner of the hall.

THEN BEGAN a period of existence which was like heaven to the castaways after the privations they had suffered while roaming the plain. Their every wish was granted. They lived on the fat of the land — strange vegetables like flat beans and carrots, steaks from the fishlike creatures which the thinsies herded like cattle and which also provided a thick milk.

The doctor set up his battered telescope near the little hut which they had constructed near the palace and made endless calculations as to the speed and orbit of the comet on which they rode. He clung desperately to the hope that they sometime might return to Earth, but admitted frankly that there was not one chance in a billion of their doing so. In technical language hard for the others to understand, he explained that the comet, in colliding with Earth, had been thrown into a parabolic orbit around the Sun which sometime might bring it back to a similar juxtaposition with its heavenly neighbor. He talked of paralaxes, relativity, and space-time as glibly as though he understood all about them, and only Frank's caustic comments could bring him back to consideration of things nearer at hand.

Apparently there was little to support his theory. Earth became smaller and smaller until it appeared only as a bright star with the Moon a tiny speck beside it. They approached the orbit of Venus until that planet grew to the

size of a dinner plate and then receded as their wabbling "phonograph disk" swept into the outer reaches of space. But the spiraling Sun and the days and nights of four hours each continued unchanged. And every night the driving bulletlike rain lashed Umenia with a thousand whips, and every day the heat stifled them.

The king's sages came to them each day, and the doctor spent hours in trying to open up to them the vast reaches of three-dimensional existence. Marie and Frank joined in this work as best they could.

"Well, Marie," Frank asked one day after she had been explaining to the king himself methods of preparing food on Earth, "do you think you could teach the old boy to mix a cherry soda?"

"I might," she laughed, "if I could only make him understand what a faucet is. He's promised to send some of his metal workers so that we may show them how to make pipes and boxes and other 'high things,' as he calls them." She busied herself tidying her growing hair before the big lens from the telescope.

LATELY BERT had started taking lone, solitary walks outside the city walls to relieve his boredom and brood over his troubles. His excuse was that he did this because he hated the sight of the thinsies. Only that morning, however, Frank, on a jaunt of his own, had come upon the other in close conversation with Puro, the secretary of state who had been "elevated" at the auditorium.

"You don't seem to fear Puro much," he now remarked, recalling that strange sight.

"Aw, I was afraid the thing would burn me if I didn't talk." But his little eyes shifted back and forth.

Frank thought no more of this conversation until the next day, when he was starting across the city limits to examine a formation not far away which the doctor believed might contain gold.

When he reached the city wall, however, he found a squad of red quardsmen drawn up to block his progress. Their vicious-looking ray guns were held at ready, and they plainly meant business.

Bending down, he touched the feelers of the commander and demanded an explanation.

"The king has issued an order that no humans are to be allowed outside of the city," was the sharp retort. "You must ask him the reason."

Furious, yet frightened by this unexpected shadow upon their idyllic existence, Frank hurried back to their house and reported the circumstance to his father.

The doctor's face went white as he listened.

"I can't understand it," he said. "Has this whole thing been a trick to lull us into security? Are these creatures really as heartless as they look? Come." He pulled on the tatters which remained of his coat. "We are lost if we accept this indignity without complaint. Let us go to Toko at once."

The king welcomed them in the throne room as though nothing had happened, but when they demanded an explanation he moved his feelers uncertainly, stammered and sputtered as though he were ashamed of what he had done, but refused to lift the embargo.

"But what have we done to deserve such an indignity?" shouted the doctor, forgetting that the monarch could only understand his thought waves.

If a Umenian shrug had been possible, Todo would have shrugged.

"It has been brought to my attention that you are planning to escape from my city," he said at last. "I find your instructions so invaluable that I do not intend to let you go. I have spoken." So saying, he removed his antennae from the doctor's toe as an indication that the audience had ended.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Frank asked as they left the spacious pen which served Toko for a palace.

"Could it be that Bert was trying to run away when the secretary of state caught him?" the doctor asked. "I gave him credit for more sense than that. There's no place to escape where he would not starve to death in a week."

However, Bert violently denied that he had endeavored to escape. Rather unnecessarily he cursed Puro, and at the same time begged his companions to respect the king's orders to the letter.

"I tell you we'll all be burned," he whimpered. "I'm not going outside the house.

AFTER THIS incident, life went on as usual, except that now a shadow of fear hung over them. Although the sages came for instruction as usual and treated them with stately courtesy, the humans felt that they were being toyed with and, when their usefulness had ceased or they had offended against the mysterious laws of the country, they would be put out of the way without compunction. At least, Marie, Frank, and his father were gripped by this unrelenting fear. Strangely enough, Bert, after a few days, broke his resolution of staying at home and once more started his roaming. He swore that he never left the city, even when he had a chance to evade the guards; but Frank once caught him cleaning his cracked shoes of what looked suspiciously like country mud.

"The days aren't so bad," Marie once remarked after a week of this harrowing existence. "Then we can see the creatures coming if they attack us. It's the nights that frighten me. Sometime when we're asleep they'll come slithering over the floor, and that will be the end of us."

"Nonsense!" Wheeler's courage caused them to cast surprised glances in his direction. "The flatlanders never go out when it's raining. We're perfectly safe at night."

SUNLIGHT THAT filtered through the thatch awakened Frank early one morning. Bert already had gone out, but the doctor still snored heavily, worn out by his studies.

The boy arose from his hard moss bed, drew on what few clothes were left to him, and tapped lightly on the screen which divided Marie's room from that of the men.

There was no answer.

He knocked more loudly and called. Still no answer. His heart filled with a nameless fear, he pushed aside the rickety door and looked in, then gasped in amazement.

The moss of which Marie had made her bed was scattered all over the floor. The few articles which she had collected to adorn the walls were likewise in disarray. A great hole was torn in the flimsy outside wall, while a strip of fiber rope lay in the middle of the room. He stared around fearfully.

"Marie!" he shouted wildly, knowing there would be no answer. "Where are you?"

His heart beat heavily, and his fists doubled to meet he knew not what menace. Could it be that the thinsies, creeping silently in on their captives, had carried off Marie and Bert for some evil purpose and without waking the others?

But his love for the girl overcame his fear. He leaped through the opening in the wall, ready to battle to the death. Outside, he received another shock. On the ground which had been protected from the rain were the marks of footprints. They had been almost obliterated. Nevertheless, he recognized them as having been made by Bert's dilapidated narrow shoes.

He dashed back into the house and shook his father into wakefulness.

"Bert's kidnaped Marie! Quick, let's go after them. The sneaking little coward! I'll break every bone in his body this time, and you can't stop me."

"Why, that's ridiculous!" cried the doctor. "Where could he take her? The country is as flat as your hand."

Nevertheless, after examining the trampled grass, he had to admit that the Umenians had no part in the affair.

Frank was for starting after the pair at once, but his father pointed out that they probably had been captured at the outskirts of the city; or, if they had not, he and his son undoubtedly would be turned back, now that day had broken.

"We must report to the king at once. He'll send a squad of red guards after them and bring them back in an hour or so. The country is as flat as your hand, and there's no place to hide."

At the palace, however, their way was barred, an unusual procedure which fretted their nerves still further. Frank's mind was full of dreadful pictures of what might happen to Marie. He pictured her lost and starving in that untracked wilderness. But he bit his lips until they bled and refused to let his thoughts carry him farther.

After a delay of several minutes, a yellow-tinted official approached and made contact with the doctor in the approved ceremonial manner, apologized for the delay, and led them through a labyrinth of chambers to the audience hall.

There everything was in buzing confusion. Purple messengers scrambled hither and yon; councillors were grouped about the king, their delicate antennae in quivering connection with his. For all the world it looked like a gigantic anthill laid open.

TOKO BROKE contact as the Earthmen were ushered in and buzzed a command that they be allowed to approach.

"Most illustrious sir," his majesty's thoughts fell over each other into his visitor's minds after a new connection had been made, "thanks for your visit, but I fear I shall have little time for you this day. My kingdom is in an uproar Puro and members of an apparently harmless youths' movement which he recently organized have revolted, and left the city. Half my army has mutinied and fled with them.

"They escaped a thousand strong, in the midst of the storm last night. Just now I received a messenger from Puro advising me that he and his followers had gone to Treeka, which is a little town near the rim of the planet and the place where he was born. He added that the Strange Tribes had promised to join him in an attack upon this city unless I agreed to abdicate at once.

"There is the messenger." He waved a stumpy, jointed leg toward a pile of charred flesh in the middle of the hall. "That was my answer."

A horrible suspicion formed in Frank's mind. Could it be that Bert had joined hands with the former secretary of state?

The king screamed with excitement as he read this thought.

"Yes, O king," admitted Doctor

Strauss. "The member of our party whom you call the 'Fearful One' also has fled, carrying with him the girl known to you as the 'Smooth One'. We know, also, that he held several conversations with Puro just before you forbade any of us to leave the city."

"Why did you not tell me this?" wailed Toko. "It was Puro who warned me that you were planning to escape. I see it all now. He had been plotting with the Fearful One and did not want you others to scent the plot. Oh, sir, I beg your pardon humbly for the injustice I have done you."

A new thought struck him. "Does this mean, illustrious sir, that the Fearful One will teach Puro's men to bring the terrors of your third dimension against us?" he quavered.

"I fear so, your majesty," answered the doctor. "The Fearful One knows much of chemistry and might not only make dreadful explosives but also machines to lift your enemies above you, where they could do great execution with their ray guns."

"This is the end of my reign, then," muttered Toko, his whole yellow body falling limp. "I must abdicate to save my people."

"You're wrong, old fellow," interrupted Frank, who had been holding his father's hand all this time and thus had been in tune with the whole conversation. "Why don't you put my father in charge of the defenses of Umenia? His wisdom is great."

The king's slit eyes brightened with hope. "Your son has inspired me with new hope, O illustrious sir!" he exclaimed. "It shall be as he suggests. You shall have Puro's place as secretary of state and teach my army, also, how to elevate themselves. Your son shall be minister of war."

"Not so fast," interrupted Frank. "My first duty is to the Smooth One. I'm going to rescue her. If I succeed and return, I shall be glad to accept your offer. Otherwise . . . " He shrugged, then added, "If your majesty will be pleased to grant me a safe conduct out of the city, I will be going."

Toko scribbled a few lines on a tablet. Snatching this with a hurried word of thanks, Frank stooped and grabbed a ray gun from the claw of a nearby guard. Then he vaulted over the wall of the audience hall, dodged hurrying Umenians, reached the street, and raced back to the hut to make an effort to pick up Bert's trail.

ONCE THERE, he made a discovery of something which he had overlooked in his first excitement. Leading away from the hole in the wall of Marie's room was a faint trail of moss fragments. He surmised that the girl must have

snatched a handful of this after Bert had bound and gagged her, and dropped it bit by bit to guide possible rescuers.

The trail did not last long, but was sufficient to give Frank an idea of the direction his rival had taken. This was straight toward the rim of the comet on the line of the least resistance; that is, on the radius of a circle.

Aided greatly now by the centrifugal force which had so hindered him in reaching the capital weeks before, Frank started along the dim trail in ten-foot leaps, praying that he might not be too late. At the city gate his passport let him through, and he plunged on into the open country.

Frank had not gone far before he saw on the wet grounds signs that Bert had had trouble in carrying his struggling burden. Marie was not exactly plump any more, due to the lack of candy and sodas, and also because of the athletic outdoor life she led on the comet. But neither had she become a featherweight. Half a mile from town, he came upon dim tracks in the road which indicated that the kidnaper had set the girl on her feet, then forced her onward, probably at the point of a weapon.

The pursuer redoubled his speed in hope of overtaking them soon. He had passed the last straggling suburb and was in the open country now. The land on either side still was intensively cultivated, however, and grew the strange, flat vegetation of Umenia in luxuriant abundance. Now and then he saw a farmer crawling about the fields.

Despite his haste, Frank could not help marveling anew at the trees which bordered the road. They lay flat on the ground with their branches pointing like magnets away from the center of the planet. These, he thought, would serve to keep him from losing his way and enable him, if he should rescue Marie in a wild and uninhabited district, to make his way back to the capital without difficutly. He hoped so, anyway.

After another hour's travel, he brought up short at a crossroads. On the damp ground were countless claw marks, made undoubtedly by Puro's revolutionists. Evidently Bert had joined them here. Frank slowed down now, realizing that a direct attack upon such a force would be fatal. He kept on doggedly, however, and soon was rewarded by hearing in the distance the buzzing like that of a thousand hives of bees, which marked the location of the enemy.

He kept at a safe distance until the short day had passed and Puro's men encamped beside a wide and shallow river. As the Sun slid over the edge of the comet, the inevitable clouds rolled down and the rain soon was lashing Frank's back until it ached.

He waited until the camp appeared asleep; then, disregarding his discomfort, crept toward it, hoping to evade any guards and effect a quick rescue.

HARDLY HAD HE approached the first line of shelters—they were nothing more than strips of metal set up on the windward side of each company of soldiers—than a flash from a ray gun seared the vegetation to cinders, despite the rain. The blast missed him only by inches. Instantly other sentries took up the fusillade. Frank was faced with the alternative of being burned to a crisp or developing tactics which would throw his attackers into confusion.

Unhesitatingly he chose the latter course. Reaching down, he grasped one of the metal strips which served as a "tent" for the soldiers. It was about eight feet long, three inches wide, and an inch thick. Using it like a pole vaulter, the youth hurled himself in great leaps straight into the heart of the enemy camp.

The strategy completely baffled the sentries, who, of course, could only see their enemy when he was standing on the ground. They set up a wild buzzing as they scuttled back and forth, which in a few moments threw the whole camp into turmoil. As he progressed in eight-foot bounds, Frank saw the companies scrambling to arms like gigantic ants whose hill has been molested. Speed was his only salvation.

As he neared the center of the encampment, Frank caught sight of Bert, who was crouched in the dim light beside a still figure on the ground. The chemist had seized a ray gun and was firing frantically at the oncomer. But he was trembling with fright and inexperienced with the weapon. To add to his difficutly, his enemy altered his jack-rabbit course repeatedly as he came charging forward.

At last he was upon them. Gathering himself for one supreme effort, he hurled himself feet foremost, striking Bert squarely in the chest and hurling him head over heels into the mud.

But Frank did not escape unscathed. For a fleeting moment the ray had made contact! The effect was as if his body had been seared by a white-hot iron.

Staggering, dazed, he bent down, grasped the girl, who was bound hand and foot, and succeeded in throwing her over his shoulder. Then, snatching up his pole, he started a wild retreat. His arms seemed drained of all strength and felt like blazing torches. He gritted his teeth and lurched on, while ray guns flashed in all directions, the rain poured down in lashing, horizontal torrents, and the wind howled.

How he escaped from that in-

ferno, he never knew. Dimly he recalled reaching the open country. Still more vaguely he remembered that when the pursuit had died away he had allowed Marie to slip from his shoulders and had cut her bonds. After that—nothing.

A long while later Frank came back to consciousness to find himself lying in his old bed in the hut. A dim light shown by the bedside, and the rattle of paper near by convinced him that his adventure had not been a halucination.

His old fear for Marie came back to him with a rush as his mind cleared. He tried to sit up, but felt a detaining hand on his shoulder. Marie was bending over him. For a moment he stared up at her sweet, anxious face.

" 'Lo, darling," he said softly as though he had always used that term of endearment. "You're really beautiful, aren't you?"

She blushed.

"Thank God, you have come back to me," she whispered, kneeling beside him. "For a while we thought that . . . "

Suddenly tears filled her eyes. She bent down and touched her lips to his in their first kiss. Frank did not marvel at this change from their almost casual relationship in the past. It seemed now as if they had always been lovers, but had not known it.

"Tell me about yourself." He captured one of her slim hands in his.

"You know most of it already. Bert sneaked into my room that morning and tied my hands and feet before I awakened. The storm was making so much noise that I couldn't rouse you by my screaming. He jammed a gag into my mouth. Then he dragged me out and carried me for a while. When he wasn't looking, I dropped bits of moss as a guide to you. I knew you would follow.

"Bert wore himself out in the first half mile. When he set me down, I hoped you would catch up with us. But he prodded me along with a ray gun until we caught up with Puro. Then I almost despaired, until you came flying through the air and picked me up."

"Did Bert molest you in any way?"

"No. Puro kept him too busy talking about plans for three-dimensional weapons and explosives. You see, that old flat devil has a little town on the edge of the planet. Ever since he was elevated he has been planning a revolt. Our spies tell us that he is already manufacturing munitions according to Bert's specifications."

"Wait a minute. How long have I been lying here like this?"

"Two weeks, darling. You had a terrible burn. We thought you'd never recover. The best thinsie doc-

tors from all over Umenia came to treat you."

A WEEK LATER, Frank was strong enough to be up and about. Slowly he threaded his way through the Umenian capital, which had become an armed camp during his absence, and marveled at the changes that had come over the thinsies since he last had seen them.

"Oh, you've got a lot to learn about the Umenians," chuckled the doctor. "They aren't really two-dimensional, of course — no living thing could be. They merely thought in two dimensions, just as we think in three, merely because we've had no need of a fourth dimension. This flat world allowed them to fulfill all their desires without rising above it. In fact, they prefer to live in two dimensions. It was an awful struggle to elevate them."

Since Frank had left the city, however, the inhabitants seemed to have grasped many ideas of the third dimension. The walls were surrounded by shallow defense trenches; many of the soldiers were moving about dragging supply wagons behind them, while a company or so of the thinsies had been provided with little tricycles on which their heads and what might be called their shoulders rested. These vehicles lifted their occupants two feet above the ground and enabled them to become conscious of height for the first time in their history. Frank was amazed to see the ease with which they scooted about.

"I had intended to equip the whole army with those 'elevators,'" explained the doctor, "but the king wants to attack with very little delay, so we could get few of them completed in time for the advance Don't you think they'll give us a great advantage over the rebels?"

He wilted visibly when Frank explained that Bert probably would hit on the same idea.

"Don't think he has it in him," grunted the little man. "Well, we must lick him, anyway. Our lives won't be safe until we do."

Even Toko had succumbed to the three-dimensional urge. He greeted the convalescent from a raised metal throne when the trio of Earthlings went into the royal tent. He still used his antennae to communicate with them telepathetically, since even the doctor had never been able to learn the buzzing audible language of the Umenians.

"Your illustrious father has indeed opened my eyes to a new world," he said courteously. "He is now my secretary of state and is going to lead the attack upon the rebels."

"But I don't know the first thing about military tactics," the doctor groaned after they had finished

paying their respects to the monarch and were alone once more. "What shall I do?"

"I don't know a thing about fighting, either," said Frank. "Now, if it were football . . ."

"Fine," cried Marie. "Let's make a football game out of it. How would you proceed?"

"Well, the flatheads who aren't provided with kiddie cars could be the linesmen. We'll divide the Umenians who have been elevated into two divisions of one hundred each to represent the right and left half backs. The three of us will receive the ball at fullback."

"What ball?" asked the girl.

"Let's not worry about that just yet. The capital will be the goal post for old Umenia. If Puro is defeated, he'll fall back on his city. We'll let the enemy kick off in midfield and try to run the ball clear back over the edge of the planet."

"How about the strategy of the home team?" queried his father.

"That's right. Wheeler's knowledge of chemistry is the ball you were asking for. Puro hasn't had time to construct guns, but he could have made bombs and grenades. We'll have to use open formation, then."

AS THE SUN slanted toward the zenith in closer and closer spirals, King Toko's army marched, as queer a sight as a vision in a nightmare. In the van wriggled eight companies of one hundred flatlanders each. Behind them scooted two hundred others, mounted on their platforms and able to wreak destruction above the bodies of the "linesmen." In the rear of the thinsies marched Frank, the doctor, and Marie. The girl had refused to be left behind, declaring that she was as good a soldier as any man there.

Ten days of travel brought them to Puro's camp. But the alarm had gone before, and the rebel army was drawn up to receive them.

"Thought so," said Frank. "Notice the artillery."

In the rear of the camp could be seen a line of earthworks, over which peeped the muzzles of what looked like a battery of cannon. Behind these, Bert could be seen crouching low to the ground.

"I thought you said there would be no cannon!" Marie began.

"Just sheet-metal mortars," explained the doctor. "Range probably only a few hundred yards."

"Why not try a flank movement and force them to remount those guns?" asked Frank.

"You forget that we're on the 'up' side of the planet," returned his father. "If we flank them, our positions will be reversed, and we'll find it hard to charge them against the centrifugal pull. No, we'd better advance in close formation until they open fire, then spread out and continue by rushes. Their first

shots will go wild and do little or no damage."

Striving to conquer a shaky feeling in his legs, the doctor then gave the necessary commands to the captains of the Umenian companies, and the advance began. Frank meanwhile renewed his pleas for Marie to stay behind, but she shook her head stubbornly and gripped a ray gun as she plodded along beside him.

"If you are defeated, I can't escape," she said. "If I'm with you, maybe I can help. The battle isn't always to the strong, somebody said."

The little army went forward with a rush; but, strangely enough, found no resistance to their advance. Instead, Puro's forces, at the head of which could be discerned Bert's spare figure, turned and scuttled pell-mell from the trenches.

Buzzing like maddened bees, Toko's forces poured over the deserted breastworks. Frank, Marie, the doctor, and a few of their thinsie aids were quickly outdistanced by the victory-seeking soldiery.

Too late Frank scented an ambush. They had reached the center of the enemy camp when he shouted wildly: "The cannon! Mind the cannon!"

Looking behind them, the Earth people gasped in dismay. Pale, greenish gas was belching from the muzzles of the flimsy "guns," and, carried by the planet's unvarying wind, was drifting silently down upon them.

"Chlorine gas," cried the doctor, cold fear gripping his heart. "Get above it, Frank, or we're done for! I'll run ahead and warn the king. You two and what thinsies have stayed with us try to capture the battery and turn off the gas."

FRANK AND MARIE went into hurried contact with their aids, who numbered scarcely more than a dozen, then swung to the right to dodge the deadly, spreading fog, and began a hampered run "uphill" to the guns. Hardly had they started, however, when the sand seemed to boil to right and left of the emplacement and a score of Puro's men, who had lain hidden beneath the smoothed-over surface during the advance, crawled into view. Ray guns were grasped in their claws, gas masks were strapped over their ugly flat mazzles, and their foreparts were elevated by tricycles similar to those used by the royal forces.

Then began a strange duel. The red heat rays of the loyal Umenians spurted forth on their errands of destruction, but were met in midair by the flashes from the guns of the rebels. The result was a series of loud explosions which canceled the effects of both weapons. Back and forth wove the beams, dimly visible in the sunlight, always

keeping in crackling contact except when one of the opponents would slip his beam around that of his enemy, exactly as a fencer uses his rapier. Then would come a short, agonized buzz, a ray gun would tumble into the sand, and a flatlander would stiffen in smoking death.

Frank and Marie soon found themselves engaged with two of Puro's oldiers. Her face white and terror in her eyes, the girl yet handled her unfamiliar weapon like a veteran, dodging out of harm's way as a red beam flashed close, swaying, side-stepping like a swordsman. Whenever Frank could find time to steal a glance in her direction, he was amazed to note the grace and agility with which she fought.

It was one of those side glances which almost signed his death warrant. At the instant when his eyes were refocusing on his own enemy, he stepped into one of the holes wherein the rebels had been in ambush, stumbled, and went to his knees, his gun flying into the air.

The creature with which he had been engaged hesitated a moment as its untrained eyes tried to follow this quick maneuver. Then it located its enemy again, and the ray swung steadily down to burn the enemy to a cinder.

Out of the corner of his eye Frank saw Marie swing her weapon to focus on his foe. This left her unprotected from her own adversary. He tried to shout a warning — to tell her not to mind him but to save herself — but at that instant heard a reassuring hiss from behind him as one of his flat aids, recognizing the danger, scrambled into the battle, caught Marie's adversary off guard, and reduced it to smoking ruin.

"Keep your mind on your work after this, Frank," gasped the girl. "I can take care of myself. Anyway, we've got them on the run."

Surely enough, the growing casualties in the ranks of the opposing company had broken its morale. Abandoning the unwieldy tricycles, the defenders of the battery were scuttling madly to safety, leaving the gas guns unprotected.

IT TOOK FRANK but a moment to shut off the chlorine valves, but he could do nothing to stop the cloud of gas already emitted, which was rolling down the plain in a thick blanket toward friend and foe alike. From the other side of this curtain loud explosions and excited buzzings told that Puro's men had stopped their feigned retreat and turned upon the king's forces, who thus were to be held in a trap until the gas swept down to strangle them.

Panting with exhaustion, Frank and Marie watched the tumbling green waves sweep slowly over the sand. They were silent in dazed

horror. Frank tried to speak, but his dry throat would not emit a sound. He pictured his father strangling, falling, dying behind that curtain, and a wild impulse to scream, to fling himself into it, almost overpowered him.

"I don't feel so badly for the thinsies", he heard Marie confessing softly as she clung to his arm. "They never seem quite real to me. But your father is caught in there. We'll have to save him, somehow."

"If we could only let them know that the gas blanket is only a hundred yards thick, I believe they could charge back through it without much damage," replied the other. "But if they let it drift down on them while the enemy stops their advance, all will be dead before it drifts on. It's moving very slowly and won't pass over for minutes. I'm sure of that."

"A hundred yards thick, you say?" Marie gasped.

Well, maybe two hundred. Not more than that. Wait. I'll chance it."

Suiting the action to the word, Frank ripped off what remained of his shirt and wrapped it around his nose and mouth. "Good-by, Marie," he cried thickly through the improvised mask, and was gone before she could protest, running straight toward the gas screen.

"He'll never make it!" the girl moaned in terror. "He has to come

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back through it, too, and he's still weak."

She wrung her hands as she watched him disappear into the mist.

Frank ran as he had never done on the gridiron. The devilish green poison burned his eyes and blinded him; his lungs soon began quaking for air, but he kept on doggedly, holding his breath as his thoughts raced ahead. Treated the old man bad enough. Couldn't let him be trapped like this. Must get through!

His knees grew weak as though they were turning to water. His head throbbed like a drum. Still there was no end to the gas, but the sounds of fighting grew stronger, telling him that he was traveling in the right direction.

Like a spring mechanism which has run down, his legs sprawled from under him. He plunged forward a few more steps, took a long, tearing, involuntary breath, and fell. All over, he mused vaguely.

But the air did not claw at his lungs as he had expected. Then he realized that he had broken through the screen somewhere before he collapsed. This thought and the fresh air revived him. He scrambled to his feet and, reeling and groggy, stumbled toward where Toko's men were engaged by their gas-masked enemy.

"Dad, dad," he panted as the doctor came running to meet him. "Turn them back! The gas is only a hundred yards thick. We've shut it off. If Toko's men retreat through it, they can escape. If they stay here, they'll be suffocated."

Doctor Strauss shouted with delight at this chance for life and ran to communicate with the king. Toko communicated with his captains. And within a few minutes after Frank had burst through the screen, the royal army was in orderly, though precipitate, retreat, leaving their enemies nonplussed at what they must have considered a suicidal flight.

Back through the green hell Frank plunged, one arm around the shoulders of his father, pushing the old man ahead as both were shaken by fits of coughing. No use trying not to breathe at the slow pace he now was obliged to take. Must use only the tops of his lungs. Easy there, don't cough!

He dragged the doctor forward as the latter's steps began to falter. At last he was forced to pick the older man up and carry him. If only one of the hundreds of Umenians whom he heard coughing and rustling over the ground at his feet could rise up and help him carry his burden!

Marie was lifting his father from his back! Frank slipped into pleasant oblivion.

HE REVIVED to feel a cooling sensation in his raw throat. He felt the clawlike hands of a thinsie doctor manipulating his chest. Through red-rimmed eyes he made out Marie's face bending over him.

"I'm all right, darling," he managed to gasp.

"Most certainly you are out of danger, honorable, sir," he felt the thoughts of his physician humming through his brain. "Your courage has saved Umenia. Your noble parent is doing nicely, also. Do not exert yourself, however,"

"How is the battle going?" the patient gasped, his blurred mind filled with visions of the masked enemy pouring down upon them.

"We've got them licked," Marie answered. "We followed up the gas curtain and struck them while they were still demoralized at Toko's retreat. Our men ran so fast that they were practically unharmed by the chlorine gas. The field is a shambles."

And, in fact, when Frank insisted on sitting up, it was to witness a debacle. Not far off was a little group of perhaps a hundred survivors from the rebel army. These were surrounded by buzzing hordes of royalists.

Puro's men presented a sorry spcetacle. Their flimsy "elevators" were almost all lost or broken, and they were reduced to their former two-dimensional state.

As his vision cleared, Frank drew in his breath sharply. In the center of that circle Bert Wheeler was crouched, shouting unheeded orders, imploring, yammering in a mad frenzy of fear.

"Can't we save Bert?" croaked Frank. "After all, he isn't bad enough to deserve a fate like that."

"I'm afraid not," Marie sighed. "The king and his men blame Bert for this whole affair."

The group of survivors was dwindling rapidly as they spoke. Tim after time little puffs of smoke would arise and leave a rebel shriveled into a pile of brownish ashes. Yet the doomed creatures kept up a steady return fire and held off the royalist hordes.

A few minutes more, however, and they must have realized that it was all over. Suddenly Puro's men ceased firing. Then, with one accord, their ray guns swung inward and flashed together.

Even at that distance, the other Earthlings could see Bert's agonized expression as he leaped to his feet screaming when the rays focused their combined strength upon him. For a moment he stood with his feet enveloped in a sea of red flame. Then he began to grow shorter! Screaming still, he seemed to melt a foot into the ground before he flung out both arms and crashed forward on his face.

The shafts of light did not falter. Bert's writhing body continued to

melt into the sand. His screaming became a moan and died away. Puro's false leader had paid the price of failure.

Frank could not tear his eyes away as the royalists, infuriated by this thwarting of their efforts to capture the unfortunate youth, went into action. Their rays swept the nearly defenseless rebels like a scourge. There was a spurt or two of red flame in reply. Then the last of Puro's following was gone.

"Oh, how awful!" whimpered Marie, shuddering convulsively as she clung to her lover. "Poor old Bert didn't deserve that."

And that was all the epitaph he received.

DARKNESS WAS falling by the time King Toko had rallied his forces and paid his respects to his secretary of state, who now was able to sit up and talk a bit, although his lungs had been badly scorched by the gas.

"Will you deign to return to my capital city, most illustrious sir, and receive all the honors which Umenia can confer upon you?" his majesty demanded as he and the Earthlings sat in contact on the blood-stained field.

"You honor us," sighed the little doctor a trifle bitterly as he glanced up into the evening sky where the Earth hung, green and fair, like a giant scythe blade. "We will try to repay you for your hospitality by teaching your people all that we know."

Hours later, as the two disabled men and the girl were being dragged homeward over the sand on a makeshift litter made of discarded elevators and drawn by a score of the thinsie soldiers, the doctor began muttering almost deliriously.

"There are these rocket ships," he murmured while Frank and Marie clasped each other's hands and smiled tenderly down at him. "Maybe we can build one and get back to Earth. Never can tell. What a write-up I'd get in the papers if we did!"

Bound To Be Read

THE MIND PARASITES
by Colin Wilson

Arkham House; Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1967; the text has been reproduced by offset from British edition by courtesy of Messrs. Arthur Barker, Ltd.; 222pp plus preface; dust jacket by Frank Upatel; $4.00.

The short stories and novelets of H. P. Lovecraft first began to appear before the general public in 1923, when *Dagon* was reprinted in the October issue of *WEIRD TALES:* and in 1928, the first story in what would be his master series of tales, *The Call of Cthulhu,* was presented in the February issue. This series was tremendously successful, and it would not be many years before we began to see "Lovecraft" stories from other authors, of varying quality, also rooted in HPL's particular mythology. I myself attempted one such, The *Leapers,* in 1942.

I have not read all the exhibits in the large collection of Lovecraft pastiches, but of those I have read, all are what I would call variations on Lovecraft's theme, and none (my own exhibit being no exception) is genuinely Lovecraftian. The present novel is the first I have read which I would call truly Lovecraftian.

And the reason for this is that all the others have done no more than to vary or embellish various superficial aspects of Lovecraft's master series (for these *are* the works of a master, for all the inequalities, relaxations of powers, etc., in some of the individual items).

There may be a number of reasons why no one else has done it before, but first of all, no one who had the qualifications also had the market; those who were able to write adequate pastiches of HPL for *WEIRD TALES,* etc., lacked the qualifications — and I include even so good a writer as August Derleth, whose continuation of the Cthulhu series I find enjoyable as I find his pastiches of Sherlock Holmes in the Solar Pons stories.

The preliminary qualifications are (a) temperament (b) breadth of erudition. When Derleth, Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, etc., started to write Lovecraft-type stories, they were talented young men, by no means uneducated; but when HPL himself started to write his major series, he was a man enriched with life experience (however limited in some ways) and the possessor of an astonishingly broad fund of knowledge in the sciences, literature, history, religion, etc. In other words, he had the resources. The others did not, and this is in no way to be taken as a slur upon them. It was not something to be expected at the time. And, in addition, they did not have the temperament — not, if you please, the specific psychology, the exact gestalt of fears, phobias,

inhibitions, desires, insight, etc., that HPL had; this is unrepeatable; but rather an inner manner of looking at the universe similar to Lovecraft's, which would make their work genuinely Lovecraftian, yet would not be expressed in HPL's very particular way.

The author of the present book has a Lovecraftian manner of looking at the universe, and it is this which satisfies me that here, at last, we have a genuine Lovecraftian novel. The best pastiches of other authors writing Lovecraft type stories might at times be mistaken for actual stories by HPL on the superficial levels of style and plot, etc. I do not think that anyone would think *The Mind Parasites* to have been written by Lovecraft were he to read a copy where all identification of the author had been removed. The essence of HPL is here, while the accidents are the author's.

The story takes place at the end of the twentieth century, and is science fiction; it unfolds slowly toward a revelation and a struggle, but this is not a plot-story, any more than HPL's best works were plot stories. It is immensely rich in the broad spectrum of arachaeology, history, art, psychology, psychosexology (not to be confused with eroticism; there is nothing erotic in the tale at all), etc., and it is this richness which makes demands upon the reader and which I find rewarding. The author's premeses are thoroughly worked out, and I am grateful to Mr. Derleth for making available to me a book which I expect to re-read more than once.

Sadly, this is not, as it might have been, the end of critical comment; it cannot be, and the reason why it cannot be is to be found in the final paragraph of the author's most interesting preface, where he tells of his experiences in reading Lovecraft and of the genes is of this novel. The final paragraph reads in part: "I should also add that the ghastly, flaccid writing of the opening pages was supposed to be a parody of the Stevenson-Machen type of narrator, with perhaps a touch of Serenus Zeitblom from Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. It didn't come off; but what the hell. I'd rather get on with another book than tinker about with it . . ." *

That, I presume, is supposed to be a bit of "camp" confession, the sort of semi-humorous, self-deprecation which is supposed to disarm the reader (or critic), who is expected to respond generously, saying, "Oh—it isn't really as bad as all that." (Apparently many critics and reviewers, extracts from whose glowing notices appear on the back cover jacket, were entirely taken in by it.)

*The balance of the paragraph reads: "I have also cut out a fifty thousand word extract from Karel Weismann's Historical Reflections from the middle of this novel; my wife felt that it slowed down the narrative. I may later publish it as a separate volume." I note this balance lest some readers wonder whether what was not quoted above tends to modify the above. It doesn't, for all that it is amusing; but since the excerpts from Weismann's major work are among the best writing in the novel, I hope that Wilson will find a way to give us more extracts from them.

Well, it *is* as bad as all that, and I consider it an outrage.

This is something which many readers will find difficult to understand, but I think I can illustrate the principle best by going into another field of art. The conductor, Arturo Toscanini (one of the truly great conductors of our day) often used to say to the orchestra: "I put my blood!" And he was not exaggerating, not trying to deceive anyone, not indulging in exhibitionism; he was telling the simple truth. His rages at the orchestra were sparked by the fact that he knew they were not giving everything they had; they were giving 75%, maybe 80% — and then taking it easy — relaxing. At one time, he asked, during a particularly difficult rehearsal, "Could you possibly play this passage just a little more softly?" (Apparently this passage was one where the effect Toscanini wanted — the effect which arduous study and insight told him this was what the composer wanted — was hard for that particular choir to achieve under the precise musical circumstances.) They tried again, and did indeed get it more softly. Toscanini exploded. Pigs! So you *can* do it! Why did you not do it before? (Why do you force me to scream at you before you will do what you *can* do? Why do you sit there and relax when you can play this music correctly if you are willing to make the effort. Pigs! I put my blood. Why do you not put yours?)

But when he saw that the men were putting their blood, were giving 100% then Toscanini did not go into rages if, even then, there was a failure to produce what he believed the composer called for. It was not failure that drew his wrath, for he knew how often Toscanini failed, even when Toscanini was putting his blood — he would say "Toscanini is stupid" as readily as he called lazy players pigs; it was the refusal to make the effort which he would not tolerate.

And it is not failure, not the fact that what originally seemed like a good idea (even if it was actually a very bad idea — of that I have no knowledge) didn't come off, that draws my wrath upon the head of Mr. Collin Wilson. Had he written in the passage quoted something to the effect that he was not satisfied with the opening; he realized that it was not right; but after exhausting labor he found it was the best he could do — had he said something like this, I would still have to say that the writing is poor there, and in other places as well, at times; but I could say so with sympathy.

For it is very true that few artists of any worth are really satisfied with very much of their finished work. Eventually a story, a book, a poem, an article, has to be abandoned. One has put one's blood, and it still isn't right. Let it go, and get on with the next work; perhaps something has been learned by this failure.

To the Colin Wilson who provided the superb content of *The Mind Parasites,* and who proved in something like 80% (perhaps more) of the book that he can write excellently, I take off my hat. To the Colin Wilson who is willing to coast along on 80% (perhaps more), and just doesn't want to make the effort to improve a shoddy 20% (or perhaps not so much) I put my hat back on again, and find it very easy to hate him. RAWL

Down To Earth

Several readers have asked about the meaning of the lines "author of . . . " under the by-lines on our title pages; why not list some of the particular writer's best stories? The purpose of this device is to indicate an author's previous appearances in *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION;* information on other stories is given elsewhere. Thus if you see only one title listed, you know the author has appeared here only once before; if two, twice before; and if you see an "etc." following the second title, then the first title is that of the author's first story to appear in FSF and the second his most recent appearance; the "etc." refers to others in between. All clear?

As of this writing, there have not been enough replies to the question about listing the editorial on the preference page for me to estimate the wishes of a majority of the active readers. So far, though, a plurality is against it.

David Charles Paskow writes from Philadelphia: "After one year of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION,* you have every reason to feel a definite sense of accomplishment. The magazine has made tremendous strides in this brief period, and the Fall, 1967, issue was the best so far.

"The yellow-green-black cover provided good contrasts, and Finlay's illustration had a startling photographic negative effect.

"With the establishment of the readers' departments (meaning letters and books) and your continuing editorials, the magazine has a definite 'friendly' atmosphere. No, do not list the editorials on the preference page—your editorials are excellent unto themselves, and it would be unfair to have to choose between well expressed opinion and classic, already proven, fiction . . . Editorials should provoke comments, not ratings."

That final sentence pretty well expresses my own feelings in the matter. Should the active readers indicate that they want to vote on the editorials, however, you can solve any problems this would involve (in relation to whether an editorial seemed better or not so good as a particular story) by tying the editorial with the story in question.

Not voting on it at all, leaving that space blank, would require my scoring the editorial in last place, one point more than the highest number given to any of the stories scored (except for "X" votes which accrue an extra penalty point). One fault in my scoring system is that I have to do this sort of thing with any ballot where any item or items are not rated—otherwise, the tabulation

would give them scores far too low in numeral count, and the lowest scores mean the highest rating in the final reckoning. (It's necessary, at times, to revise a ballot which has been filled out incorrectly—such a one which rates a story both "O"—outstanding—and "1"—first place,. or which has both a numeral and an "X"—dislike—beside it. The voter's intentions are clear enough, but they won't work as set down; I revise only to express the intentions in relation to making the ballot work. As I have noted previously, this system of rating and scoring is not perfect, but it seems to have fewer faults than any other I have heard of, especially where the statistical sample is rather small.)

David Cantrell writes from Tucson, Arizona: "I don't think it (*A Single Rose*) was good enough to win the $200 *FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* contest, but it was good enough to warrant magazine publication . . . The winners of that contest were announced in their June 1965 issue and the stories appeared in that issue. First place, *The Ancient Last,* by Herb Lehrman; second place, *Stand-in,* by Greg Benford.

"It is very pleasant," writes *Mrs. Barbara D. Smith,* "to be able to buy a new magazine in which the older stories are printed. I am 27, so it is impossible for me to have a 'collection' of the short stories of this type that dates back very far without hours and hours of search through musty used book stores. Also, some of the very old ones are very expensive. Having tried in the past to do this, it is a relief to have an easier source . . .

"Would it be possible for you to make available prints of the pictures you use on your cover? It is difficult to find better 'fantasy and wonder' pictures than on the covers of some science fiction magazines."

Unfortunately, it isn't feasible for us to make prints of the illustrations we use on our covers; folios of some of the science fiction artists' drawings (Virgil Finlay and Lawrence Stevens, for example) have been prepared in the past, but my impression is that, even though these are now collectors' items, they did not prove to be profitable venture for the publishers.

Loren B. Thompson, Jr., of Livingston, New Jersey, lays it on the lines to us, as he writes: "Since 1920 there have been 100 science fiction magazines in the United States. 90 have failed. I fear that *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* will be number 91 unless drastic changes are made from its present condition. The book and editorial sections should be about 5 pages each, and a letter section of the same length should be introduced. The number of pages is satisfactory, but they should be enlarged in height and width. . . Retain some of the finer old stories you dig up but you must have some new stories or the science fiction reading public will disregard your magazine as just a reprint sheet. Virgil Finlay is an excellent interior illustrator, however as a cover, Spring's layout was poor. Put in color.

"I would not write this letter if I did not consider FSF a legitimate attempt to break into the field. Obvi-

ously, Heinlein and Clarke are as yet too rich for your financial resources. Some good new authors would be Chester Anderson, Michael Kurland, Philip High, Emil Petaja, Tom Godwin, and Harlan Ellison. Don't reprint Heinlein stories—they have been reprinted too many times already. I realize that instant change is impossible, however some changes should be made immediately, such as the new stories. If you work at it, you will survive, but not in your present form.

"Good luck to you."

Thanks for your good wishes, Friend Thompson, but didn't you forget to include a *guarantee* that following your prescription would absolutely mean success? What if we did all you asked and still went under?

William Gaunt, writes from Chicago, Illinois: "Having read science fiction for fourteen years and collected a library of some 1500 novels, I have found in your magazine stories I have missed. Thanks for the great story, *The Last American* and the great art work with it. Please keep printing the same kind of stories, and best of luck with your future issues."

No matter what we do, FSF could be the 91st science fiction title to fold up; however, Readers Smith and Gaunt have correctly divined our aims, and the great bulk of the mail we receive indicates that a very large majority of the active readers approve them and want us to continue along the same lines. We shall, indeed, use new stories wherever we can; this depends upon two things (1) obtaining new stories that are fun to read to our eyes—whether the tone is light or heavy, whether these are action or think pieces (2) finding space in a particular issue.

The stories which we are reviving for you from generally unobtainable issues of thirty years or more back do run to greater length than present-day "short stories" and every issue has presented us with a jigsaw puzzle problem, as something has to be taken out. As I noted elsewhere, it is especially difficult to determine the effective length of these old stories—something which is not the same as the actual word count. It's a matter of lines; a matter of long or short paragraphs; a matter of the difference between the lines in the original magazine version and the lines in our—so that one 8,000 word story (by actual count) may come out effectively longer than another. I have a feeling that a mathematically-minded reader might be able to offer some sort of simple arithmetical formula for this; but even if someone helped me out thus, the fact would still remain that I cannot get as much into any given issue as I want to get.

Richard A. Lupoff writes from Poughkeepsie, New York: "I was pleased to see J. A. Mitchell's *The Last American* reprinted in *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* #3. It's an amusing little work, all the more intriguing for what it omits than for what it includes. What story could have been told by the 'last American' and his wife and the 'one old man?' What was the tale of the woman with the long, yellow hair? What, actually, had happened to the American

people? And to Europe. What sort of civilization did the Persians of the year 2951 have?

"Mitchell never tells. However, my copy of *The Last American* credits him also with the authorship of *Amos Judd, The Pines of Lory, That First Affair, Gloria Victis,* and *Life's Fairy Tales.* I have never seen copies of any of these and could only guess at which—if any—of them have a fantastic or scientific background.

The edition of *The Last American* which I have is the 'Edition De Luxe' by Stokes, 1902, bearing also the 1889 copyright notice. The edition contains the same text as the one you apparently used, but it is stretched out to 151 page , largely by means of inter-chapter 'frontispieces'. The book also contains eight full-color plates, really most impressive, showing the vividly-gowned Persians in New York, in Central Park, one scene of an explorer perched atop the Statue of Liberty, visiting Washington, etc.

"The art credit reads: 'Illustrated in Color by F. W. Read / With Decorative Designs by / Albert D. Blashfield / and Illustrations by / The Author. The 'Decorative Designs' are the interior 'frontispieces', and are all pretty clearly signed. The text illustrations—which are the ones you used in your magazine version—are therefore, by process of elimination, attributable to the author, Mitchell. A man of multiple talents, J. A. Mitchell.

"I wonder if any of your readers are familiar with Mitchell's other works, or know anything about the man himself.

"In closing, let me say that you're doing a marvelous job with the magazine under obviously adverse circumstances. Long may the magzaine flourish . . . "

After expressing great enthusiasm over *The Last American,* and appreciation of *Beyond the Singing Flame,* British correspondent *Mike Ashley,* continues: "I had the misfortune to read the last part—sorry, no, fourth part—and then the third part of *The Man Who Awoke* series, in that order, and to date had read no more. Those I read about two years ago now, when I found some old issues of *WONDER STORIES* (in my opinion, the best pulp science fiction magazine ever), and these two yarns certainly stick in my memory; but I was frustrated at wondering how it ended with *The Elixer.* Now if you reprint the entire series, I at last have a chance of finding out. I'm that much clearer now, having read part one. But please reprint a part per issue, and don't, for god's sake, fold *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*; otherwise, I'll never find out how it ended. If you keep to a part an issue, I at least have only another year to wait. I think I can do it!

"*Disowned* seems a rather preposterous story. I always tend to go off a bit when an author starts belaboring with scientific detail, when you know half the time he hardly knew what he was talking about anyway. But ignoring that, *Disowned* is an effective story. The ending is similar in some respects to J. P. Brennan's *Levitation,* though I must admit I prefer the latter yarn because of its stronger impact.

"Which leaves *A Single Rose.* There are some stories which tend

to leave me in a very melancholy mood—which, I hastily add, I enjoy. *A Single Rose* was one such. Another was *Night and Silence,* as well as *Lazarus*, from MAGAZINE OF *HORROR*. I always call them 'mood stories' because I can think of no other expression, and this tends to encompass many types of stories. Any one though that reeks some nostalgia into my bones, even if the story isn't nostalgic at all, is always a sure bet with me. This was one such. Very good. If it was entered for the *FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* contest, it should have won. It was far better than the two finalists they printed."

/ An exception to the general expressions of approval for the present series by Laurence Manning is this comment from *Richard Grose* of Michigan: "After *Voice of Atlantis* and *Seeds From Space*, I found author Manning's *The Man Who Awoke* very disappointing. This *a la* Wells *The Time Machine* story bothers me for several reasons. They are:

"1. It is marred by excessive sentimentality. Example—Carstairs, the ever-faithful servitor. (Oh, No! This sort of stuff was OK for Dickins in the 1860's, but this story was written in the 1930's.)

"2. I find it an absurd notion that in thousands of years the English language would have undergone almost no change.

"3. The hero's name—gee, I wonder if the name 'Winters' could have a symbolic meaning in the story.

"The slap at Communism is all right, I guess, but do they have to call each other 'Comrade'? Whereas *The Last American*, which, of course, also deals with the far future exhibits pathos, *The Man Who Awoke* strikes me as bathos."

T. O'Conor Sloane used to run letters like this (letters taking strong exception, not always with as clearly stated reasons as Friend Grose offers, to stories which the majority of active readers praised) with the heading: "Pity the poor Editor, who has to please everyone."

Well . . . I do not feel that I have to please everyone; and in fact, I refuse to try: that way lies madness and horrible death. At least, I do not have to please everyone all the time. I hope that Friend Grose will be pleased by other things I do, because in order to please the majority (which has stated enthusiasm for the "Man Who Awoke" series) I shall have to continue to displease him in at least one story for two issues more. I don't want to lose Friend Grose . . . but if I had to choose between alienating him and alienating a much larger number . . . ? May I not have to choose! RAWL

Science Fiction As Delight

(Continued from page 7)

Verne: *To the Center of the Earth, Robur the Conqueror, The Master of the World, From the Earth to the Moon, Around the World in 80 Days, The English at the North Pole, The Desert of Ice.* This was all re-reading, except for the last two; and while I have written introductions to three of these for the Airmont soft-cover editions, it was not necessary for me to re-read them; skimmimg would have been sufficient. I re-read them cover to cover because I wanted to.

Wells: *The Island of Dr. Moreau, In the Days of the Comet,* (first reading), *The World Set Free* (first reading), *The Shape of Things to Come* (first reading), and numerous of the short stories. The short stories were all re-reading, and while a few specific stories were looked up for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR,* many were re-read which I knew before starting would not be suitable, but which I wanted to re-read.

Burroughs: *Tarzan of the Apes* (re-reading), the next dozen Tarzan books which were a first reading—and I expect to get through them all; the Mars series, of which *Synthetic Men of Mars* and *Llana of Gathol* were a first

reading; The first two Venus books (re-reading); a first reading of the first three Pellucidar novels; *The Moon Maid,* and *The Moon Men.*

Finally, in the discussion below, I reserve the right to mention, from memory, items by my six authors which I have not re-read during the period, since what I did read has qualified them. Now to examine our three old-timers under each of the six categories listed.

INVENTION

Verne: Here we find the greatest strength in the literal meaning of the term. Unemployed and cold in Paris, the young Verne found refuge and warmth in the public libraries where he devoured books on travel and geography, and then discovered the wonders of science, discovery, and invention. Precisely which of his wonderful devices were entirely the fruit of his imagination, from the first, I'm not learned enough to assess. It doesn't matter, for it was the refinements of that which already existed in primitive form which make for the fascination of Verne's machines, etc. And the thorough working out of his devices is no less impressive today than then, in many instances. How many scientists, at the time that *Robur the Conqueror* was written, predicted that the heavier-than-air flying machine would prove to be superior to the lighter-than-air craft?

Wells: There is a story that one day the young H. G. Wells, trying to make his way as a writer, approached the formidable Frank Harris (not too much older) and asked to be put on his reviewer's list for scientific works. Harris replied, amidst profanity, "Why don't you write funny stories about science?" H. G. took the hint, and *The Stolen Bacillus* made a hit and produced a lasting impression on the young author. He would not, as Harris urged, become a science-humorist; but here was a field where he could work with comfort, and the public was interested in reading fiction rooted in science.

The Verne type of invention is there in some of the stories, such as *The First Men in the Moon* and *When the Sleeper Wakes,* etc., but this is not Wells's first interest; and the fact that it is not shows itself in what Basil Davenport notes as Wells's willingness to flimflam the reader with scientific-sounding double-talk. You get sound explorations of possibility in *When the Sleeper Wakes* (the list is rather impressive in this novel), but you also get "Cavourite" in *The First Men in the Moon.* Verne himself would have very much liked to have employed some sort of anti-gravity

in order to get his space voyagers from Earth to the moon; he could find no scientific basis for it, so turned to the rocket principle; and when in later years he heard himself compared with Wells, he was not at all amused. He was incensed at Wells's "invented" science, as he was distressed by Poe's "invented" science.

The imaginary science comes quite often in Wells (time travel, invisibility through drugs, a gas that alters human behavior, etc.) and this has its own elements of delight. But the primary element of Wells's invention is sociological, an element which finally swallowed up not so much his story-telling ability but his interest in writing stories.

Burroughs: we can forget about science; here the invention lies in the story-teller's fantasies of strange and bizarre worlds and peoples, fantastic societies and customs, and an endless stream of lost or "forgotten" civilizations. There is no charge to be made of flummery here, for Burroughs had no interest in teaching scientific principles or inducing a scientific orientation in his readers, as both Verne and Wells sought to do. (For all his flim-flam, Wells was trying to get people to think about even his most magical devices in a scientific manner; and these devices were often as not merely convenient ways of getting his characters where he wanted them to go, or putting them into a situation where he could explore the human condition, highlighted by a fantastic environment.)

SUSPENSE

This is the element that I defined earlier as that which keeps you glued to the page and turning the pages, and it is a particularly subjective one; for what constitutes suspense for me may not work at all for you. I could prove, with exhaustive quotations and listings that Verne, Wells, and Burroughs rank high in invention; I could not prove that their works constitute suspenseful reading for everyone.

Plot is an ingredient, but the plots of Verne's wonderful voyages are pretty similar, and the plots in the Burroughs novels became so standardized quite early in his career that one could make a schematic plan of a Burroughs novel and then would only have to fill in the blanks to summarize any particular one of them. *The Moon Maid* and its sequels are the only exception that I recall, and oddly—or perhaps not so oddly—this is the single fantastic novel (the sequels at least) by ERB that I have found tedious.

Style is an ingredient, yet the element of suspense has kept me

reading and enjoying many stories which are badly written — some so bad, like *The Blind Spot* by Flint and Hall, that they could almost be classified as humor. That one can't; poor Austin Hall very obviously believed that he was writing in the grand manner of great literature. Flint was not so afflicted; his sections of *The Blind Spot* aren't much better than Hall's but at least the writing is not so pretentiously awful. (Pretentiousness in literature lies in the desire, the determination in fact, to write great prose without the ability to do so; and in Hall's case, without the awareness of how to use words and put sentences together without falling flat on one's face.) Flint's prose does not sing, by any means; but neither is it covered with bruises, lacerations, and abcesses.

Wallace West tells me that one reason why Verne's style seems to be so flat, in nearly all the translations that we had when I first started reading him, is that the stories were originally translated into English designed for juvenile readers. In the original French, he says, Verne proves to be quite a good stylist, something you would not suspect from reading the standard translations.

Burroughs writes colorfully enough, and I'm not often aware of his tripping over his own prose.

When it comes to Wells, we come to one who has mastered English, so that even those science fiction novels wherein the story teller has abdicated, and the preacher assumed the throne, I find my interest is often held by the writing alone.

But in the long run, I cannot communicate anything like a full measure of just what it is that keeps me reading these authors; for me, they have the element of suspense, and that is that.

CHARACTERIZATION

Verne and Burroughs did not stop growing once they began to write and get their writings published consistently, and you will find differences in tone between the early and the late works — differences which show a somewhat greater ability in depicting the human condition. But the differences do not seem to me to be wide enough to warrant much examination. They both had the ability to make their characters vivid; I remember quite a number of them — and yet, although there are more instances in Verne than in Burroughs, I cannot say I really know many of them. They remain acquaintances, people one likes or

dislikes, but are little more than small collections of more or less interesting characteristics.

Wells was a thinker and close observer of humanity, and of himself. And his inner growth, and inner torment, expresses itself in his fiction so that (as with any other writer who has explored inner space) while his characters are projections of this or that facet or facets of the author's personality, colored by experience of observing these same elements expressed by other people, one feels one knows many of his characters.

I find a rather curious phenomenon in myself, in regard to fictional characters. The names of the vivid, superficially explored ones, the stereotypes, the caricatures, stick in my memory. Mention Jules Verne and such names as Phileas Fogg, Fix the Detective, Captain Nemo, Ned Land, Robur, Captain Hatteras, Impy Barbicane, etc., come at once to mind. (Of these, I'd say that Nemo, Robur, and Hatteras are more fully developed than most in Verne.) I also remember some I'd rather forget, such distressing examples of the author's projected bitterness or prejudice as Isaac Hakkabut and Frycollin. Mention Burroughs, and I think at once of Tarzan, John Carter, Carson Napier, Jason Gridley, David Innes, La, etc. But when we come to Wells, and many other authors whose characters are explored in depth and ambiguity, the names come more slowly. I remember at once that character who tells the story of the comet—ah yes, Willie . . . Willie . . . ? Then—oh yes, of course: Dr. Moreau; Grifiin, the invisible man; Cavour; that character in *The War of the Worlds* . . . ? ; the King and that character who appears in the final section of *The World Set Free.* I wonder if this is a strictly individual problem, or whether other readers experience anything like such a difficulty.

SURPRISE

On further thought, there is no need to break this down; for, even more than the matter of suspense, the fact that you or I can re-read a story we already know, and find that it has not grown stale, perhaps find something it which we did not notice at all before, proves its freshness. What originally surprised remains a delight.

RICHNESS

While there will be differences of opinion as to just what constitutes spiritual wealth and spiritual poverty, shown in a work that is supposed to be a creative expression, it is possible to agree that such things exist.

Verne: shows rich exuberance in the early and middle stories; the zest for discovery is infectious and out of this exuberance comes the cornucopia of imaginary inventions, etc. In later stories, we find more reflection, growing out of his disillusionment and bitterness, when he realized that scientific progress, which his own work had sparked notably in his lifetime, was not the key to a better world for everyone after all.

Wells: grows increasingly cantankerous and shrill in his preaching, as it becomes increasingly evident to him that while people are buying and reading his books, and making much of him as a great author, no one is really paying attention to what he considers to be vital prescriptions for the health of society. And, like Verne, his illusions fester as he sees that scientific progress does not cure the fundamental ills in the human condition, but rather exaggerates them in all too many instances. The beauty of the early works sours and becomes ugliness; the happy guide becomes an ill-tempered prodder, whose stings and lashes seem to have no effect. *The Shape of Things to Come* is a particularly ugly work, wherein the only hope for humanity is depicted in a spiritually impoverished form of puritanical dictatorship, driving people toward an ill-defined utopia. Then, after the years of impoverished agony, richness returns in a short novel which is one of the great tales of horror: *The Croquet Player.*

To repeat: richness (beauty) is not a synonym for prettiness, or niceness. An apocryphal story about Jesus tells of how one day He and some of the disciples came upon the corrupting remains of a dog. The disciples drew back in loathing, fearing ritual contamination, dread of which was inbred in the Jewish religious training, but the Beloved Master stood there gazing at the maggot-infested cadaver; and finally, when one of them timidly urged him to come away from the loathsome object, He said to them sadly, "Did none of you see what beautiful teeth the creature had?"

REWARD

The demands that Verne's stories make upon readers are somewhat greater today than they were at the time his finest stories were written. We see scientific progress transforming the world around us day by day, and this or that element still has its area of fascination and excitement (otherwise, there would be no readers for science fiction at all); but we cannot see this with the eyes of the 19th

century. Moreover, hardly any of it is new now. It was easier to read with the attention that he demanded as he worked out the inventions, and made the wonderful voyages, back then.

Yet, we can still pretend. We can read these stories the way we read a well-written historical novel, and live in this past where so much we take for granted was a futurama; and by this suspension—not so much of disbelief as of realization of just what did and did not happen since, of historical present awareness—something of the wonder with which Verne's contemporaries read his novels can be our reward.

Burroughs makes no demands upon us other than that we follow him and save the arguments until later; forget about the inconsistencies and attend to the picture before us right now. Become a child with wide eyes and enter into the game he is playing with us; it's fun.

Wells's demands are heavy. Think; feel; experience, and don't expect to get along with the action in a hurry. At the time he wrote these great novels and short stories, much in them was shocking—just as much in Heinlein is shocking to present day readers—cutting across their certainties about what was true and what was right. Wells is deliberately out to upset you, to tear at your comfortable notions; and if a great deal of what was shocking then seems commonplace today, that is partly a compliment to the author. These are no longer issues today partly because H. G. made issues of them back then.

We can see now that the accuracy of many of the predictions (although some proved to be quite sound) is by no means an important issue; for the fundamental thing he was talking about is still worth paying attention to: The more the mess humanity is in at the present moment changes, the more it remains the same, because human stupidity remains the same. Something in Wells died when his fundamental illusion died—the illusion that human stupidity is vulnerable to systematic intellectual and emotional assault. Specific manifestations are, specific individuals are, but the fundamental condition remains to express itself in different costumes; that is all. Wells never recovered from this discovery.

In the final installment we shall look at three contemporary authors who can be considered heirs of both Verne and Wells—and perhaps were more influenced than they would care to admit by Burroughs, although this is moot and I don't intend to make an issue of it. RAWL

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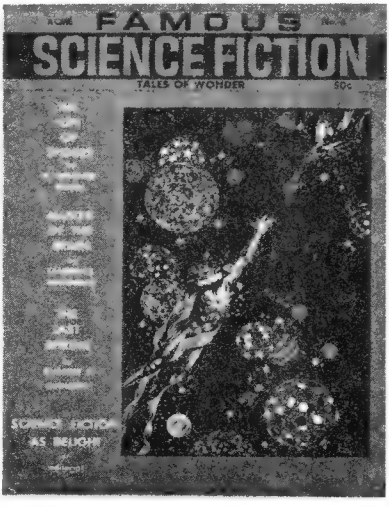

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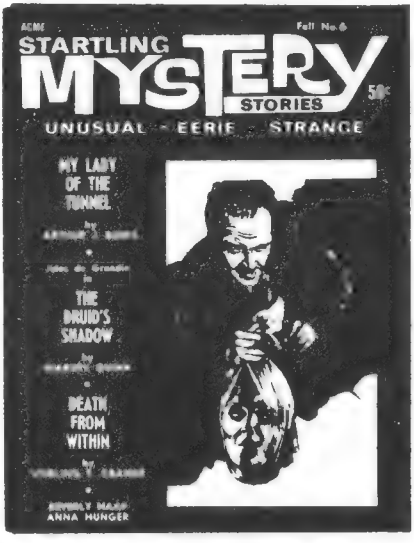

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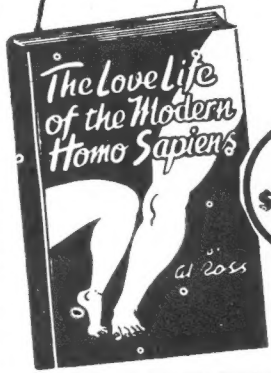

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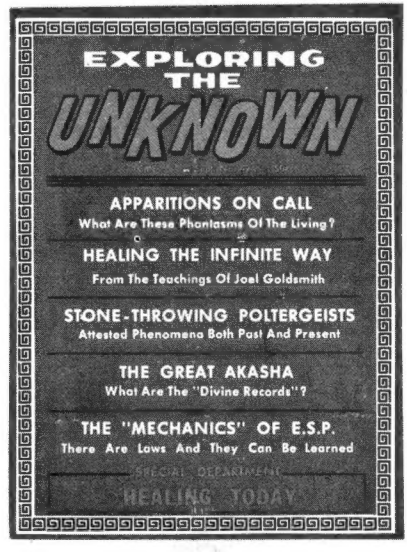

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